7

Lying Cretans

According to the letter to Titus, ostensibly addressed by Paul to one of his closest coworkers (Titus 1:4, cf. 2 Cor 8:23; Gal 2:3), Paul had left Titus "behind in Crete" to "put in order what remained to be done, and ... appoint elders in every town" (1:5).[1] The requirements that these would-be leaders had to meet form the topic of the first section of the letter body

[1] Not all arguments in support of the inauthenticity of Titus are equally convincing. All three of the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim, 2 Tim, and Titus) have frequently been deemed pseudepigraphical on the basis of observations that pertain only to one or two of the letters, on the uncertain assumption that they must have all have been authored by the same person or group of people (for further discussion, see, e.g., Jens Herzer, "Zwischen Mythos und Wahrheit: Neue Perspektiven auf die sogenannten Pastoralbriefe," *NTS* 63 [2017]: 428–50). Still, even if Titus is considered in isolation, there are relatively strong indications that this letter was not authored by Paul, but written several decades after his death, and that the letter was meant to be read not by Titus but by a later community of readers. Was this community located on Crete? Manuel Vogel, "Die Kreterpolemik des Titusbriefes und die antike Ethnographie," *ZNW* 101 (2010): 252–66, has argued that Titus 1:12 renders this an unlikely scenario: If the author intended to win over a Cretan audience, why would he include such a scathing assessment of the Cretans? More likely, Vogel suggest, the author wrote to an audience elsewhere and sought to denigrate his opponents' teaching by implying that it derived from the "ever-lying Cretans." Similarly, Troy W. Martin, "Entextualized and Implied Rhetorical Situations: The Case of 1 Timothy and Titus," *Biblical Research* 45 (2000): 13: "Of all the numerous destinations available to the implied author, only Crete permits this author to quote the proverb in Titus 1:12 as a description of the opponents. It is this proverb that provides the resolution for the enigma of the destination of this epistle." For the possibility that the Cretan setting may (also) have served to address certain gaps in the early history of Pauline Christianity, see my "Pauline Biography and the Letter to Titus: A Response to Jens Herzer," *Journal for the Study of Paul and His Letters* 9 (2019): 52–61, doi:10.5325/jstudpaullett.9.1-2.0052. For an attempt to argue that the Cretan address is not fictitious, see George M. Wieland, "Roman Crete and the Letter to Titus," *NTS* 55 (2009): 338–54.

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(1:5–9). The author emphasizes the importance of appointing "men" (1:6) who meet all necessary criteria, including having a "firm grasp of the word that is trustworthy in accordance with the teaching," so that they can refute opponents (1:9). The immediately following section (1:10–16) offers an extensive but ultimately nebulous profile of these opponents. The teachers and their message are associated with circumcision and "Jewish myths" (1:10, 14), yet their identity and the content of their message otherwise remain largely shrouded in mystery.

This literary context forms the setting for the author's infamous claim that "Cretans are always liars, vicious beasts, lazy gluttons" (Κρῆτες ἀεὶ ψεῦσται, κακὰ θηρία, γαστέρες ἀργαί, 1:12b). He credits this assessment to an unnamed source: "It was one of them, their very own prophet, who said [this]" (1:12a). Lest there be any doubt about whether the author subscribed to this evaluation of the Cretan character, he immediately affirmed its accuracy: "That testimony is true. For this reason rebuke them sharply, so that they may become sound in the faith" (1:13). In context, the quotation serves to develop the polemic against rival teachers by claiming that this assessment of the population of Crete, of whom these local leaders are cast as prime examples, is accurate. The negative estimation of the Cretans' collective character constitutes grounds for forceful action against them ("rebuke them sharply") and reinforces the need to appoint capable leaders on the island.[2]

[2] T. Christopher Hoklotubbe, "Civilized Christ-Followers among Barbaric Cretans and Superstitious Judeans: Negotiating Ethnic Hierarchies in Titus 1:10–14," *JBL* 140 (2021): 369–90, argues that the denigration of the Cretans serves the rhetorical purpose of "elevating the status" of Christ-followers "along an ethnic hierarchy" (384). By denigrating the Cretans, the community of Christ-followers, widely suspected of immoral and uncivil behavior, appears more acceptable. Hoklotubbe recognizes that "the immediate rhetorical aim of the author in Titus 1:10–14 is to discredit rival teachers and to distinguish the cultivation of moral Christ-adherent leaders (1:5–9) and their 'sound teachings' (2:1)" but argues that the author accomplishes these aims "in part, by leveraging an ethnographic discourse that plays on the stereotypes of rival ethnic groups, with the implied and consequent effect of increasing the status of his own in-group at the expense of others" (387). While many readers may have considered themselves better than those ever-lying Cretans, the text does not suggest much of an interest in developing an ethnographic contrast between Cretans and Christ-followers; the focus is squarely on contrasting the "blameless" teachers of "sound doctrine" (1:5–9) with their false counterparts. Stefan Krauter, "Cretan Memories: Crete in the Letter to Titus and the Acts of Titus," *EC* 13 (2022): 452 n. 29, suggests that Titus 1:12b applies primarily to the audience of the rival teachers, rather than those teachers themselves, on the grounds that it is impossible that the latter's faith would become sound (cf. 1:13b), since "according to Tit 1:16; 3:11 they are incorrigible." However, neither of those passages necessarily suggests that the rival teachers are beyond correction.

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Titus 1:12's indictment of the Cretans would seem like a clear instance of stereotyping: it straightforwardly expresses knowledge, beliefs, and expectations about the Cretans. The text, moreover, expressly claims that this assessment was not idiosyncratic to the author but more widely shared. The view that the Cretans were mendacious does indeed appear to have enjoyed broad currency. The *New Wettstein* collects an impressive array of texts, covering history, poetry, and proverbial expressions, that attests to the reputation of the Cretans as unreliable liars.[3] The Cretans were not commonly accused of being "evil beasts" and "lazy bellies" in those exact terms, but these poetic turns of phrase accurately capture their generally poor reputation and, perhaps more specifically, the stereotyped notions that they were motivated by greed and ruthlessly pursued their own interests and desires.[4] The indictment of the Cretans

[3] Georg Strecker, Udo Schnelle, and Gerald Seelig, *Neuer Wettstein: Texte zum Neuen Testament aus Griechentum und Hellenismus. Bd. II, Texte zur Briefliteratur und zur Johannesapokalypse; Teilbd.* 2 (Berlin; New York: De Gruyter, 1996), 1018–23.

[4] For the generally poor reputation of the Cretans, cf., e.g., the proverb reported by the Suda (κ.324): Κάππα διπλοῦν: ἀντὶ τοῦ κακά. τρία κάππα κάκιστα: Καππαδοκία, Κρήτη καὶ Κιλικία ("Three kappas [are] worst – Kappadokia, Krete, and Kilikia"); Polybius 33.16: "He [Antiphatas] spoke in weightier and more exalted terms than might be expected from a Cretan; for, in fact, the young man was in no way a (real) Cretan, but had shunned the Cretan coarseness" (ἐχρήσατο λόγοις βαρυτέροις ἢ κατὰ Κρῆτα καὶ σπουδαιοτέροις· καὶ γὰρ ἦν ὁ νεανίσκος οὐδαμῶς Κρητικός, ἀλλὰ πεφευγὼς τὴν Κρητικὴν ἀναγωγίαν). On their alleged avarice and ruthless pursuit of self-interest, cf. Polybius 6.46: "So much in fact do sordid love of gain and lust for wealth prevail among them, that the Cretans are the only people in the world in whose eyes no gain is disgraceful . . . owing to their ingrained lust of wealth [they] are involved in constant broils both public and private, and in murders and civil wars" (Κρηταιεῖς διὰ τὴν ἔμφυτον σφίσι πλεονεξίαν ἐν πλείσταις ἰδίᾳ <καὶ> κατὰ κοινὸν στάσεσι καὶ φόνοις καὶ πολέμοις ἐμφυλίοις ἀναστρεφομένους . . . καθόλου θ' ὁ περὶ τὴν αἰσχροκέρδειαν [cf. Titus 1:11] καὶ πλεονεξίαν τρόπος οὕτως ἐπιχωριάζει παρ' αὐτοῖς ὥστε παρὰ μόνοις Κρηταιεῦσι τῶν ἁπάντων ἀνθρώπων μηδὲν αἰσχρὸν νομίζεσθαι κέρδος); Cicero, *Rep.* 2.9.15 "Cretans and Aetolians consider robbery honorable" (*Cretes et Aetoli latrocinari honestum putent*); *Ant. Graec.* 7.654: "The Cretans are ever brigands and pirates, and never just; who ever heard of the justice of Cretans?" (αἰεὶ λησταὶ καὶ ἁλιφθόροι, οὐδὲ δίκαιοι Κρῆτες: τίς Κρητῶν οἶδε δικαιοσύνην;). Perhaps in addition to the notion that the Cretans behaved in a beastly fashion, the reference to "evil beasts" in Titus 1:12 may have an ironic connotation given the reported absence of wild animals on Crete (Pliny, *Nat.* 8.83; Plutarch, *Inim. util.* 1 [Mor. 86C]). For a recent argument that various components of the Cretans' poor reputation can be traced back to a difference in tactics between Cretan citizen armies and those of most other regions of the Greek world, see David Lewis, "The Cretan Way of War: Status, Violence and Values from the Classical Period to the Roman Conquest," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 143 (2023): 24–48 (I thank Jan Bremmer for bringing this article to my attention). Further on the relationship between Titus 1:12 and conceptions of Crete in the Greek and Roman world, Michael Scott Robertson, *Reading the Letter to Titus in Light of Crete*, Critical Approaches to Early Christianity 3 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2023), esp. 100–103.

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as beastly, gluttonous liars would also seem to fit the category of *ethnic* stereotype as delineated in Chapter 2 as they were not only obviously associated with a certain territory (Crete), but at least some ancient authors considered their characteristics to be rooted in their nature, suggesting that the vices of the Cretans were understood as a function of genealogy, not just location or culture.[5]

The assessment of the Cretans in Titus 1:12 is remarkably harsh, so much so that even some nineteenth-century authors were perturbed by it. George Findlay, who taught ministerial students at Headingley College near Leeds, wrote in 1882 in *The Expositor*: "Many a reader of St. Paul must have been inwardly troubled by this sentence. It is a charge of the severest possible kind, couched in rough and almost savage terms; and it is applied in the most sweeping style to a whole people."[6] Many more recent interpreters of this passage have sought to address such qualms by advancing exegetical proposals that avoid the conclusion that Paul was engaging in negative ethnic stereotyping. In Section 7.1, I offer a taxonomy and evaluation of these proposals and argue that none of them makes a compelling case that the author is not engaging in ethnic stereotyping of a very pejorative kind.

As in previous chapters, I subsequently turn to the history of interpretation. While nineteenth-century sources will once again have an important role to play, I will adopt a somewhat broader perspective here, since this relatively clear instance of ethnic stereotyping is particularly well suited for tracing how different generations of interpreters positioned themselves vis-à-vis this aspect of Pauline literature.[7] This more prolonged engagement with the history of reception will help draw out some of the arguments made in previous chapters about the probability that

[5] Polybius 8.16: "Bolis, inasmuch as he was a Cretan and by nature changeable . . ." (ὁ δὲ Βῶλις, ἅτε Κρὴς ὑπάρχων καὶ φύσει ποικίλος); cf. 6.46, quoted above (n. 4: τὴν ἔμφυτον . . . πλεονεξίαν). See also Jerome's comments, discussed below (p. 197). As argued in Chapter 2 (pp. 24–25), it does not follow that other ancient authors (including the author of Titus 1:12) also necessarily thought of the Cretans as an ethnic group as opposed to the population of the island. Cf. Homer, *Od.* 19.165, where "real" or "native" Cretans (Ἐτεόκρητες) are distinguished from other inhabitants of Crete.

[6] George G. Findlay, "The Reproach of the Cretans," *Expositor* II:4 (1882): 401.

[7] The reception history of Titus 1:12 has thus far not received much attention. J. Albert Harrill, "'Without Lies or Deception': Oracular Claims to Truth in the Epistle to Titus," *NTS* 63 (2017): 452–59, discusses various early Christian interpretations of Titus 1:12. Jay Twomey's otherwise very useful *The Pastoral Epistles through the Centuries* (Chichester; Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009) touches on the question of how readers interpreted the harsh criticism of the Cretans only in passing (192).

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ethnic stereotypes exerted influence on Paul and will highlight the extent to which the perceived need to absolve Paul of ethnic stereotyping – abundantly documented in Section 7.1 – is a relatively recent phenomenon. I will show that it would take a long time for anyone to register serious qualms about Titus 1:12's sweeping criticism of an ethnic group. Certainly among early Christian interpreters, this does not seem to have been much of a concern, rendering their interactions with this text strikingly different from the more recent construals to which we will turn first.

7.1 READING TITUS 1:12 IN THE TWENTIETH AND TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Commentaries published over the course of the last several decades amply bear out George Findlay's suspicion that many readers will be troubled by this text. There is a palpable sense of embarrassment in contemporary interpretations of this passage, and scholars have proposed readings that identify extenuating circumstances or altogether avoid the conclusion that Titus 1:12 wields a negative ethnic stereotype.

For some, the doubtful authenticity of Titus is of significance in this connection. Titus 1:12 has been marshalled as an argument in support of pseudepigraphy, as some scholars have argued that "it is quite impossible to imagine Paul doing anything so obtuse."[8] A convenient implication of this argument is that the bigotry of Titus 1:12 can no longer be ascribed to Christianity's foundational apostle but is to be blamed on some later imitator.

Other attempts to ease the difficulties presented by this text likewise highlight its original source, but rather than emphasizing its pseudepigraphical origins, they focus instead on the Cretan source of the quotation. Titus 1:12 identifies the source of the indictment as "a prophet of their own," which virtually all interpreters have taken as a reference to another person from Crete.[9] The Cretan in question has been variously

[8] Anthony T. Hanson, *The Pastoral Epistles*, New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids; London: Eerdmans, 1982), 177. Similarly, Heinrich Julius Holtzmann, *Die Pastoralbriefe, kritisch und exegetisch behandelt* (Leipzig: Engelmann, 1880), 64: "Mindestens stimmt die abrupte Anklage eines ganzen Volkes, unter welchem das Christenthum eben Eingang gewinnen wollte, wie solch 1, 12. 13 vorliegt, nicht zum Geist und Charakter, zur schonenden Weisheit des Verfassers der Korinther- und Römerbriefe."

[9] A few scholars have argued that Paul is instead quoting one of his opponents. So Findlay "The Reproach of the Cretans" (following Lüdwig Lemme, "Über Tit 1,12," *Theologische*

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identified as Epimenides or Callimachus, but for scholars like Donald Guthrie, the exact identification is not so important. What matters is that since "a well-known Cretan condemns his own people the apostle cannot be charged with censoriousness for his exposures."[10] Paul is repeating what a Cretan has said about his own people, so he cannot be blamed for it, or so the argument goes. This is hardly a compelling apology on behalf of the author. An insult of an ethnic group is arguably more problematic if advanced by an outsider (like Paul) than by an insider, in which case it has a self-deprecating quality.

Studien und Kritiken 55 [1882]: 133–44); Werner Thiessen, *Christen in Ephesus: Die historische und theologische Situation in vorpaulinischer und paulinischer Zeit und zur Zeit der Apostelgeschichte und der Pastoralbriefe* (Tübingen: Francke, 1995), 327. This line of interpretation has not received much support and does not solve the problem that Paul endorses a statement that does not name a particular group of believers but Cretans in general. Lemme suggests that μαρτυρία in 1:13 must be understood as "Selbstzeugnis" (similarly, Findlay, "The Reproach of the Cretans," 410: "*A self-accusation, a just description of his own party, and a 'true testimony' to what the Apostle has affirmed respecting them*" [emphasis original]) to the effect that the author confirms that the original claim about the Cretans is true *only* with respect to the opponents themselves. This seems farfetched. Lemme and Findlay refer to John 5:31, 36; 8:13, 14 as evidence that μαρτυρία can be used in the sense of testimony about oneself, but in each of these cases the testimony is qualified by "about myself/himself," suggesting that μαρτυρία on its own would not normally be understood as a statement that is true only with respect to the speaker or his community. Isaiah Luke Allen, "Paul the Bigot? Reading the Cretan Quotation of Titus 1:12 in Light of Relevance Theory" (doctoral thesis, Middlesex University/London School of Theology, 2019), pursues a similar argument (apparently independently of these earlier studies) but applies 1:13 to the entirety of 1:12 to the effect that ἡ μαρτυρία αὕτη ἐστὶν ἀληθής confirms that Paul's opponents described the Cretans in this manner. The term μαρτυρία more fittingly refers, however, to the statement about the Cretans, which clearly qualifies as a "testimony" or "evidence" and stands in need of verification since it was uttered by a third party. Moreover, on Allen's reading, the reason for refuting the opponents (δὶ ἣν αἰτίαν ἔλεγχε αὐτοὺς ἀποτόμως, 1:13) is that one of their prophets has made this comment about the Cretans. Paul was apparently so shocked by this that the entire group had to be censured for it. This seems unlikely as these sorts of disparaging assessments were common enough in antiquity. It is also unclear *why* this group would say such a thing. Allen argues that the opponents were Jewish or Judaizing teachers who were disparaging Gentiles, rather than Cretans specifically (126: "*Cretan*, among the troublemakers in the church, is code for church members who are inferior by virtue of being Gentile"), but this does not seem to be supported by anything in the text.

[10] Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, TNTC (Leicester; Grand Rapids: IVP; Eerdmans, 1990), 200. Similarly, E. K. Simpson, *The Pastoral Epistles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (London: Tyndale Press, 1954), 99: "To obviate any charge of calumniation, the apostle cites … a venerable figure in the tradition of the islanders"; E. Glenn Hinson, "1–2 Timothy and Titus," in *2 Corinthians-Philemon*, ed. Clifton J. Allen, The Broadman Bible Commentary, vol. 11 (Nashville: Broadman, 1971), 365: "A quotation achieves the purpose of sounding an alarm without leaving Paul himself open to a charge of nationalistic bigotry."

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The Paradox of Titus 1:12

Other readings of Titus 1:12 focus on the logical problem presented by the text. Since the source of the saying is a Cretan, Titus 1:12 constitutes a paradox: If the Cretan in question is speaking the truth and they are indeed "always liars," the Cretan saying this must also be lying and therefore his statement is false (and so the Cretans are not liars). However, if they are not liars, then what the Cretan is saying about the Cretans (that they are liars) must be true, which means that he himself is a liar and his statement is false. This logical problem, though not the exact formulation, can be traced back to Aristotle and his contemporary Eubulides of Miletus.[11]

On this basis, Anthony Thiselton has argued that Paul had no interest in communicating anything about the character of the Cretans but that he was engaged in a language game, the point of which was "to demonstrate a logical asymmetry between first person and third-person utterances."[12] Titus 1:12, in his view, is "an assertion about logic and language (not about Cretans)." Paul utilizes the logical paradox in order to "demonstrate the self-defeating ineffectiveness of making truth-claims which are given the lie by conduct which fails to match them."[13] Thiselton connects this with passages elsewhere in the letter that reject "stupid controversies" (3:9), and insist that "[a] bishop . . . must be blameless . . . not arrogant or quick- tempered" (1:7); "holy and self-controlled" so that he may give suitable instruction and credibly "confute those who contradict it" (1:9).[14] On Thiselton's reading, then, Titus 1:12 is about matching truthful speech with truthful conduct and has nothing to do with ethnic stereotypes. Thiselton has more recently published a popular version of

[11] See Christoph Zimmer, "Die Lügner-Antinomie in Titus 1,12," *Linguistica Biblica* 59 (1987): 6–8. It is fairly strongly attested in the Hellenistic period, especially in philosophical texts. See Patrick Gray, "The Liar Paradox and the Letter to Titus," *CBQ* 69 (2007): 304–7. Stanley Porter argues that it is not strictly speaking a paradox since Titus 1:12 does not claim that *all* Cretans are always liars (*Pastoral Epistles*, 753). On the possibility of resolving the paradox, see also John Granger Cook, "Titus 1,12: Epimenides, Ancient Christian Scholars, Zeus's Death, and the Cretan Paradox," *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum / Journal of Ancient Christianity* 25 (2021): 367–94.

[12] Anthony C. Thiselton, "The Logical Role of the Liar Paradox in Titus 1:12,13: A Dissent From the Commentaries in the Light of Philosophical and Logical Analysis," *Biblical Interpretation* 2 (1994): 207.

[13] Thiselton, "The Logical Role of the Liar Paradox in Titus 1:12,13," 214.

[14] Thiselton, "The Logical Role of the Liar Paradox in Titus 1:12,13," 213.

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this argument under the title "Is the Epistle to Titus Incurably Racist?"[15] Thiselton's answer is a decisive "no," but the title effectively highlights what is at stake for him and many others: If Thiselton's solution proves unconvincing, it would seem to follow that the letter is in fact "incurably racist."

Thiselton's argument has been criticized by many,[16] but it has also received support, most notably in an article on this passage by Patrick Gray.[17] While Gray follows Thiselton's general approach, he adds an important nuance:

> The works of Plutarch, Lucian, and the comic playwrights ... provide evidence that, in uttering or alluding to a paradox ... writers and speakers could wink at their audiences *while simultaneously broaching some weightier subject or concern*. A rhetorical precedent was therefore in place for the author to poke fun at himself in this manner and, *in the same breath, to castigate the native population* (as well as to cast aspersions on the opponents who are exploiting their *vicious natural proclivities*).[18]

While Gray follows Thiselton in arguing that Paul was deliberately setting up a paradox, he maintains that it was also meant to communicate something about the Cretans' "vicious natural proclivities."[19] This renders the interpretation more plausible as it avoids Thiselton's far-fetched conclusion that a claim about Cretans (1:12) in a letter addressed to someone currently on Crete (1:5) in truth has nothing to do with Cretans. Another reason why it is difficult to accept Thiselton's argument

[15] In Anthony C. Thiselton, *Puzzling Passages in Paul: Forty Conundrums Calmy Considered* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2018), 117–22.

[16] Anette Merz, *Die fiktive Selbstauslegung des Paulus: Intertextuelle Studien zur Intention und Rezeption der Pastoralbriefe*, NTOA 52 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), 37–39, dubs Thiselton's proposal "völlig verfehlt" and "ein Taschenspielertrick, der in seiner Durchführung nicht überzeugt und in seiner Motivation fragwürdig ist." For other critical evaluations of Thiselton's hypothesis, see Vogel, "Kreterpolemik," 255 n. 13; Bruce W. Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows: The Appearance of New Women and the Pauline Communities* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 151 n. 47; Gerd Häfner, "Polemik in den Pastoralbriefen," in *Polemik in der frühchristlichen Literatur: Texte und Kontexte*, ed. Oda Wischmeyer and Lorenzo Scornaienchi, BZNW 170 (Berlin; New York: De Gruyter, 2011), 309 n. 53; I. Howard Marshall and Philip Towner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 203; Porter, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 753–54.

[17] Gray, "The Liar Paradox and the Letter to Titus."

[18] Gray, "The Liar Paradox and the Letter to Titus," 309 (emphases added).

[19] Similarly, Reggie M. Kidd, "Titus as Apologia: Grace for Liars, Beasts, and Bellies," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 21 (1999): 190, finds "Thiselton's thesis about the mutually reinforcing nature of belief system and lifestyle to be cogent" but holds that the author is nonetheless arguing against specifically Cretan ideas.

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that the passage has nothing to do with Cretans but that "the aim of this passage is . . . to show the ineffectiveness of language and communication that is not grounded in appropriate behavior and conduct"[20] is the absence of any kind of elaboration or clarification by the author to explain how the paradox of Titus 1:12 would suggest that conclusion. What we find instead in the immediate context are instructions concerning the sort of people that Titus will encounter, which suggests that Titus 1:12 must be understood along those lines, that is, as providing information about the character of the Cretans. Thiselton argues that Titus 1:12 cannot be a harsh assessment of the Cretan character, because that would require that "the writer throws to the winds the courtesy, gentleness, and self-control which he urges throughout the entire epistle."[21] Yet "courtesy" and "gentleness" are hardly apt descriptions of what the author advocates in the immediate context: Titus is to "refute the gainsayers" (1:9) and "silence" those (1:11) whose "very minds and consciences are corrupted" (1:15) and who are "detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work" (1:16). The context strongly suggests that the author wished to convey to "Titus" that the proverbial assessment of the Cretans as lazy, beastly liars was accurate and should inform his interaction with them. Titus 1:13 makes the point quite clearly. Following this claim about the Cretans' character, Paul states: "That testimony is true. *For this reason* rebuke them sharply (δι' ἣν αἰτίαν ἔλεγχε αὐτοὺς ἀποτόμως)."

While the notion that Titus 1:12 was not meant to convey information about the Cretans is unpersuasive, the question remains whether Paul intentionally deployed a logical paradox. Gray, following Thiselton, answers in the affirmative and argues that it was introduced to criticize, in an ironic manner, improper and misleading modes of speech:

> By reproducing the paradox in Titus 1:12, the author calls to mind the conventional wisdom that dwelling on such riddles is, at best, a fruitless exercise. Paradoxes constitute an abuse of language insofar as they deal in clandestine nonsense and lead to a descent into the absurd. Viewed in light of the authors' recurring emphasis on proper speech . . . the ironic turn in Titus comes into clearer focus.[22]

On this reading, Paul was engaging ironically in conduct that he advised against.[23] It seems rather convoluted to criticize speech that is less-than-

[20] Thiselton, *Puzzling Passages*, 119.
[21] Thiselton, "The Logical Role of the Liar Paradox in Titus 1," 214.
[22] Gray, "The Liar Paradox and the Letter to Titus," 310.
[23] Other scholars also suggest that certain parts of the text are ironic or otherwise humorous. E.g., Andreas Köstenberger, *Commentary on 1–2 Timothy and Titus* (Nashville:

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straightforward by employing such speech oneself. Moreover, it seems well-nigh impossible that readers would draw this conclusion, and this impression is borne out by the history of interpretation in which, to the best of my knowledge, no one previously suggested this reading. If the statement in Titus 1:12 was intended to exemplify the sort of speech that Titus must avoid, surely the author would have given some indication that such was the case.[24]

Further complicating Gray's (as well as Thiselton's) argument is the previously mentioned, immediately following line, which asserts that "this testimony is true" (Titus 1:13a). Gray argues that the reason for this addition is "that it leads to or exacerbates a contradiction of sorts," because it confirms the truth of what a habitual liar has said.[25] This accords with Thiselton's view that it was intended as "an ironic comment on logical regress *ad infinitum*."[26] As noted above, the author is focused on the character of his opponents, not on questions of formal logic, so a more likely scenario is that Titus 1:13a was added because the author "realizes – alas, too late – that he has become entangled in a Cretan web of contradiction and wants to clear up potential confusion by declaring the preceding statement truthful."[27] Alternatively, he may have been

Holman Reference, 2017), 319: "Paul . . . cites as true prophecy – tongue firmly in cheek – the Cretan self-witness . . . that 'Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.'" The context of "rebuking" and "silencing" opponents seems difficult to reconcile with such levity; the author appears deeply serious about the deficient character of the Cretans and the need to correct them severely.

[24] Cf. Gray, "The Liar Paradox and the Letter to Titus," 309: "Given that the implied reader of the correspondence is a close associate, the implied author could reasonably expect him to get the joke." But in practice this would only work if the audience really consisted of close associates of Paul, who knew when he was being facetious and when he was not. In the present case, this is a doubtful supposition. See also n. 23 on the unlikelihood that Titus 1:12 was meant as a joke.

[25] Gray, "The Liar Paradox and the Letter to Titus," 308.

[26] Thiselton, "The Logical Role of the Liar Paradox in Titus 1," 212.

[27] Gray, "The Liar Paradox and the Letter to Titus," 308. Gray dismisses this possibility, however: "If he is astute enough to spot his error, then he must be familiar with the paradox and, moreover, one would expect him to realize that he actually compounds the error by declaring, in lapidary fashion, that the statement is true. (Without the affirmation, in fact, the paradox has a fairly straightforward solution: One could assert that the statement attributed to Epimenides is simply false. All Cretans may be habitual liars, but some might on rare, unguarded occasions tell the truth.)" Neither of these arguments is particularly convincing. The first is essentially tautological ("if he recognized that he set up a paradox, he must have known that it is a paradox"), the second is unconvincing because the addition of "this testimony is true" does open up a way out of the paradox; it clarifies that the statement is true despite the fact that it was first uttered by one of those habitually lying Cretans. It seems more plausible, then, that Paul quoted the statement

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unaware of or simply ignored the paradoxical character of what came before and added Titus 1:13a for no other reason than to affirm the accuracy of what was said by the Cretan "prophet."

A final point of criticism of Gray and Thiselton is that while their argument that Paul is primarily interested in the liar paradox could perhaps clarify the phrase "the Cretans are always liars," it does not do a very good job of explaining what comes next: "vicious brutes and lazy bellies." If the intention was to highlight the need for proper speech by ironically employing a paradox about lying, why include allegations that are unrelated to speaking truthfully?[28]

This last part of Titus 1:12 has been emphasized by Riemer Faber. In Faber's view, the regularly neglected insult "vicious brutes and lazy bellies" serves to highlight questionable conduct that forms the counterpart to the Cretans' habitual lying. Faber argues that Titus 1:12 must be understood as an "exemplum" intended to "show that doctrinal error is accompanied by moral corruption," and it is therefore "not intended as racist slur, polemical invective or philosophical dilemma."[29] It is difficult to see how this conclusion follows from the argument that the author is cautioning against moral corruption. The statement "members of ethnic group X always lie and are lazy" may perhaps serve to convey that lying is accompanied by a questionable work ethic, but is it *therefore* not an

about the Cretans in order to make a point about the Cretans' character but recognized that this created a paradox that obscured his point and therefore clarified that "this testimony is true." Similarly, e.g., Hanson, *New Century Bible Commentary*, 177: "The author has to put this in. Otherwise he is open to the objection that, since all Cretans are liars, Epimenides must be a liar also."

[28] Thiselton briefly addresses this objection at the end of his article ("The Logical Role of the Liar Paradox in Titus 1," 221–22) and offers three possible responses: (1) Perhaps this was already the traditional form by the first century; (2) the addition "extends the scope of the liar paradox to other first-person utterances of a parallel order, though not of the same purely *formal* level of contradiction" (emphasis original); (3) the paradox "'Everything that I say is a lie: is this true?' invites a further proposition to exemplify the formal principle of the paradox." I fail to see how any of these options satisfactorily explains why the author felt that it would be expedient to add/leave in these two items if his primary goal was "asserting a proposition which *prima facie* entails its own denial by *logical necessity*" (207, emphasis original). Thiselton may be right that the presence of "vicious brutes and lazy bellies" does not sink his argument (222), but it certainly weakens it. Cf. Timo Glaser, *Paulus als Briefroman erzählt: Studien zum antiken Briefroman und seiner christlichen Rezeption in den Pastoralbriefen*, NTOA 76 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 231 n. 82: "Thiselton … geht auf den 'Einschub' zwischen V. 12bα und 13a nur kurz und m.E. nicht ausreichend ein."

[29] Riemer A. Faber, "'Evil Beasts, Lazy Gluttons': A Neglected Theme in the Epistle to Titus," *Westminster Theological Journal* 67 (2005): 145.

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ethnic slur? The problem of Titus 1:12 is not that it opposes lying, uncivilized behavior, or gluttony, but that it disparages an entire ethnic group while doing so.

The Reputation of the Cretans

Other attempts to explain Titus 1:12 have focused on the reason why the Cretans were accused of being liars in the first place. The "original lie" of the Cretans, attested in a variety of ancient sources, was the claim that Zeus was a mere human being who had died and whose tomb was located on the island.[30] Reggie M. Kidd has argued on this basis that Titus 1:12 was intended as criticism of the Cretan understanding of the divine: "For first century readers or auditors the saying had a specific and concrete – or better, earthy – referent: Cretans' claim that Zeus had been in a previous career a mere human being."[31] For Kidd, therefore, Titus 1:12 is "not [a] racial slur" but rather an instance of "religious criticism."[32] While Kidd and others[33] may well be right that many early readers would have drawn

[30] The ancient evidence is collected in J. Rendel Harris, "The Cretans Are Always Liars," *Expositor* 7 (1906): 305–17; Kidd, "Titus as Apologia," 193–200.

[31] Kidd, "Titus as Apologia," 200.

[32] Kidd, "Titus as Apologia," 200; cf. 201: "The Epimenidean hexameter allows the Paul who writes to Titus to have the Cretan say on the apostle's own behalf: 'Look, in the end, we know that what everybody says about us is right: God, if he is truly God, cannot just be one of us! No wonder our lives are so messed up!'" Kidd connects this emphasis on the Cretans' error about Zeus with the Christology of the letter: "I suggest that Titus' distinctive Christological language is crafted in such a way as to ensure that these believers do not give the wrong impression to their contemporaries about what it is for God to have 'earthed' his own life in the specific context of human existence." For another effort to connect the letter's Christology with the traditions about Zeus' tomb, see Martin, "Entextualized and Implied Rhetorical Situations: The Case of 1 Timothy and Titus," esp. 13–14. Manuel Vogel ("Kreterpolemik," 266 n. 46) is skeptical: "[Martin] geht ... von der Zeusgrabtradition aus und ordnet diese der in Tit geführten Auseinandersetzung um eine Jesu Grab leugnende doketische Christologie zu. Dagegen steht der schlichte Wortlaut des Textes: Tit hebt nicht auf den Inhalt der kretischen 'Erzlüge' ab, sondern auf den inferioren kretischen Charakter."

[33] Cf. similar comments by Frank S. Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament: A Canonical and Synthetic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 424–25: "This is not simply the insensitive repetition of a social stereotype .... The Cretans were regarded by many in antiquity as lying specifically about Zeus since they claimed that he was a man divinized for his benefactions to society and whose tomb could be seen on their island. The proverb links the Cretans (sic) lie about God with their behavior. Paul's quotation of the proverb is, therefore, an effort to say that at least the false teachers fit this stereotype of Cretans because they have a false understanding of God, and this false understanding fits hand in glove with their vicious way of life."

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a connection with the stories about Zeus' tomb, the difficulty with this interpretation is that Paul does not mention the "religious" background of the identification of the Cretans as liars at all. He does not criticize the Cretans *inasmuch as* they adhere to certain misguided notions about the divine, but he disparages them in general terms; he does not criticize them for their religious convictions but simply as Cretans. Again, the problem is *how* the author makes his case: by disparaging an ethnic group.

What the emphasis on the background of the barb about Cretan mendacity makes clear, though, is that "Paul," as previously noted, was by no means the only one who regarded the Cretans as deceitful. For some scholars, this means that the insults of Titus 1:12 were of limited consequence.[34] Others note, more generally, that ethnic stereotypes and accompanying slurs were common in antiquity. Oxford's J. N. D. Kelly, for instance, suggested on this basis that "The Apostle . . . would scarcely have expected the true Christians in the Cretan communities to suffer from nationalist touchiness."[35] Whether objecting to being called "perpetual liars, evil beasts and lazy bellies" can be fairly dismissed as "touchiness," I leave for the reader to decide, but it is true that in light of the frequency and intensity of polemics in the ancient world, the insulted party may well have responded differently than would be the case today. Still, the probability that negative ethnic stereotyping had a different moral valence in the ancient world than today does not render it innocent, and it certainly does not follow that Titus 1:12 is somehow not a negative ethnic stereotype.[36]

The Addressees

A considerable number of interpreters have sought to alleviate the offense of Titus 1:12 by arguing that Paul did not address *all* Cretans in Titus

[34] E.g., Marshall and Towner, *Pastoral Epistles*, 202: "The saying was so common that it had lost its original barb." Apart from the fact that slurs that are frequently repeated can still be deeply hurtful, it should be noted that while Cretans may relatively frequently have been called liars, their identification as evil beasts and lazy gluttons does not seem to have been as common (as noted above, p. 178).

[35] J. N. D. Kelly, *Pastoral Epistles* (London: A&C Black, 1963), 235.

[36] Cf. Wolfgang Stegemann, "Anti-Semitic and Racist Prejudices in Titus 1:10–16," in *Ethnicity and the Bible*, ed. Mark G. Brett (Brill: Leiden, 1996), 294: "Neither the historical situation of the letter to Titus, nor the general mentality of Mediterranean culture, which presumably took little offence at the text's anti-semitic and racist prejudices, can 'justify' its prejudice structure. In any case the ancient situation and mentality can be no criterion for its reception today." On the question of the moral evaluation of Pauline ethnic stereotyping, see pp. 219–24.

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1:12. Gordon Fee, for instance, asserts that "this is not a blanket indictment of all Cretans."[37] Two main considerations can be cited in support of this view. First, Paul offers his indictment of the Cretans in the context of polemicizing against certain "rebellious people, idle talkers and deceivers" (Titus 1:10), and the beastly, lazy liars that he has in mind appear to be first and foremost these opponents, rather than the general population of Crete.[38] Second, what would be the point of trying to missionize the island and organize Christian communities if all of its inhabitants were deemed incurably mendacious, rapacious, and gluttonous? If Paul believed that Titus 1:12 was without exception true of all Cretans, Titus' mission would be a waste of time and energy, as would be his very letter. The difficulty with this line of interpretation is that Titus 1:12 itself does not make exceptions.[39] The context suggests that the author may not ultimately have agreed with the implications of this sweeping statement (at least not upon further reflection), but this does not alter the fact that he expresses himself in this manner. This gets to the heart of the problem: the author offers a deeply negative ethnic stereotype even though such stereotypes are essentially always patently false, because no ethnic group consists exclusively of corrupt individuals. What is more, even if the text had allowed for exceptions, this would not render it unproblematic; the assertion that *most* of the Cretans are perpetual liars, evil beasts, and lazy bellies is not ultimately all that much of an improvement over the claim that *all* of them are.

[37] Gordon D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1984), 179. Similarly, e.g., Samuel Ngewa, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*, Africa Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 348: "Paul is not making a blanket statement about all Cretans." Marshall and Towner, *Pastoral Epistles*, 202: "It is surely taken for granted that the converted members of the church would be regarded as delivered from the sins of their race." Martin Dibelius and Hans Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), argue that the text itself allows for this exception because ἀεί can be translated as "mostly." Thiselton, "Logical Role," 211, notes that this is a use "which according to most lexicographers is possible but uncharacteristic except for the woodenly over-literal." Michael Choniates (c. 1140–1220) explains the significance of ἀεί as follows, "it says that the Cretans are always liars, not indeed (liars) at one time, but not at another" (Κρῆτες ἀεί φησι ψεῦσται οὐχ ὁτὲ μὲν, ὁτὲ δ' οὔ, *Or.* 4.100).

[38] The author's anger at the rival teachers is, incidentally, another extenuating circumstance cited by Kelly, *Pastoral Epistles*, 235: "The Apostle is alarmed and angry at the sectaries' conduct, and in such a mood people do not always mince their words."

[39] As noted by Norbert Brox, *Die Pastoralbriefe: 1 Timotheus, 2 Timotheus, Titus*, Regensburger Neues Testament (Regensburg: Pustet, 1969), 288: "Es wird ja durchaus keine Einschränkung angebracht."

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Another line of interpretation has sought a solution in the opposite direction. Rather than limiting the accusation of mendacity to *some* Cretans, it argues that *all human beings* are guilty of the vices mentioned in Titus 1:12 and that there is accordingly nothing particularly offensive about "Paul's" claim concerning the Cretans. According to Reggie Kidd, Titus 1:12 does not have "any sharper an edge to it . . . than the Preacher's and the Psalmist's universal (and self-inclusive!) indictment in the hands of the Paul of the undisputed letters: 'None is righteous, no, not one. No one understands, no one seeks after God' (Rom 3:10–11, see Eccl 7:14; Ps 14:1–3)."[40] Though Kidd has several predecessors in arguing along these lines, this argument is hardly convincing.[41] While some biblical authors may have held that "all" human beings have gone astray, they do not claim all of humanity to be "vicious beasts and lazy bellies." Moreover, singling out this particular ethnic group as especially sinful does in fact result in a "sharper edge" than the indictment of all humanity, not least because any person indicting humanity is offering a "self-inclusive indictment," while Paul is not one of the Cretans whom he disparages.[42]

A final interpretive option in this vein highlights not the addressees of the insults of Titus 1:12 but the purported addressee of the letter, Titus. William D. Mounce opines that "such a strong condemnation . . . offensive as it would have been to the Cretans . . . might suggest that Titus is more of a private letter . . . as opposed to 1 Timothy, which is to be read before the Ephesian Church."[43] On the assumption that it is an authentic epistle, Titus may perhaps be viewed as a strictly private letter, but the offense of the passage is hardly removed if the objects of his deprecation were unaware of what the author wrote about them.

[40] Kidd, "Titus as Apologia," 200–201.

[41] E.g., Matthew Henry (1662–1714): "Though there may be national differences of character, yet the heart of man in every age and place is deceitful and desperately wicked" (*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible, 6 Volumes* [Peabody: Hendrickson, 2014], ad loc.). More recently, George W. Knight, The Pastoral Epistles: *A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids; Carlisle: Eerdmans; Paternoster, 1992), 29: "Paul is not making an ethnic slur, but is merely accurately observing, as the Cretans themselves and others did, how the sin that affects the whole human race comes to particular expression in this group."

[42] Cf. John Gill, *An Exposition of the New Testament, Etc. Volume 3* (London: Matthew & Leigh, 1809), ad loc.: "Lying is a sin common to human nature, and appears in men as early, or earlier than any other; and all men are guilty of it, at one time or another; but all are not habitually liars, as it seems these Cretians were: lying was a governing vice among them; they were not only guilty of it in some particular instances, but always."

[43] William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, WBC 46 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 399.

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Paul the Racist?

The interpretations surveyed thus far can be divided into two main categories:

1. *Interpretations that deny that Titus 1:12 disparages the character of the Cretan people.* To this category belong interpretations that argue that Paul speaks only of *some* Cretans, that he is referring to the Cretans' lie about Zeus' tomb rather than to their collective character, or that he was solely interested in the logical paradox rather than in the character of the Cretans.
2. *Interpretations that cite extenuating circumstances*, to the effect that it would be unfair to criticize Paul for what is said in Titus 1:12 about the Cretans. This category includes readings that argue that slurs and insults were exceedingly common in antiquity, that the statement was ironic, that it was said in a private rather than in a communal letter, that this claim had previously been made by someone from Crete, and that Paul was angry when he wrote this.[44]

Unsatisfied with either of these approaches, some more recent scholars have concluded that Titus 1:12 is an ethnic slur or even an instance of racism. In 1996, Jouette M. Bassler described Titus 1:12 as a "racial slur" and a "brutal condemnation" through which the opponents are "dehumanized."[45] In that same year, Wolfgang Stegemann published an article entitled "Antisemitic and Racist Prejudices in Titus 1:10–16."[46] Stegemann used the language of anti-Semitism in reference to the letter's

[44] For this last option, see n. 38.

[45] Jouette M. Bassler, *1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 190.

[46] Stegemann, "Anti-Semitic and Racist Prejudices in Titus 1" (= "Antisemitische und rassistische Vorurteile in Titus 1, 10–16," *Kirche und Israel* 11 [1996]: 46–61). Both Stegemann and Bassler are approvingly quoted by Annette Bourland Huizenga, *1–2 Timothy, Titus*, Wisdom Commentary (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2016), 139–40. Some earlier commentators were similarly critical of Titus 1:12, but stopped short of associating it with racism. Cf., e.g., F. D. Gealy, "I Timothy, II Timothy, Titus: Exegesis," in *The Interpreter's Bible*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick et al., vol. 11 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1955), 530: "This verse savagely attacks the Cretan heretics with a singularly indiscreet quotation which over-reaches itself to defame all Cretans"; Victor Hasler, *Die Briefe an Timotheus und Titus*, Zürcher Bibelkommentare Neues testament 12 (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1978), 90: "Eine jeder Kontrolle entzogene feindselige Polemik."

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references to Jewish people and traditions and speaks of racism in connection to the saying about the Cretans. Stegemann highlights its "discriminatory character" and its "nasty words."[47] Whether the passage is also racist "depends on the definition of what may be called ... racist."[48] Stegemann follows Albert Memmi, who argued that racism is a form of heterophobia "in which biological features of the other prompt fear and aggressive rejection."[49] Stegemann adapts this slightly to include "the feature of ethnic 'origin,' to the extent that this is understood as a kind of 'biological' characteristic."[50] On this basis, he argues that Titus 1:12

> reflects an ancient form of racism. For in the dreadful proverb about the Cretans their ethnic origins are linked with negative quasi-biological features. It assumes that all members of the ethnic group of the Cretans have negative characteristics, which disqualify them morally and in the end place them outside the human race.[51]

Manuel Vogel similarly maintained that the passage is "in as much as it uses a negative ethnographic heterostereotype, by modern standards certainly also racist."[52] I join this still relatively modest chorus of interpreters. As I argued in the previous sections, attempts to sanitize the text have fallen short. Titus 1:12 propagates a deeply negative ethnic stereotype, which, depending on the definition one adopts, may be qualified as racist.[53] To the two main categories of interpretations outlined above may, therefore, be added a third one: interpretations

[47] Stegemann, "Anti-Semitic and Racist Prejudices in Titus 1," 289, 293.
[48] Stegemann, "Anti-Semitic and Racist Prejudices in Titus 1," 293.
[49] Stegemann, "Anti-Semitic and Racist Prejudices in Titus 1," 286–87. With reference to A. Memmi, "Rassismus," in *Was heißt Rassismus?*, ed. Detlev Claussen (Darmstadt: Wbg, 1994), 220–21. For discussion of Memmi's definition of racism, see Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*, 19–20.
[50] Stegemann, "Anti-Semitic and Racist Prejudices in Titus 1," 287.
[51] Stegemann, "Anti-Semitic and Racist Prejudices in Titus 1," 293–94.
[52] Vogel, "Kreterpolemik," 265 n. 45. German original: "... sofern es ein negatives ethnographisches Heterostereotyp verwendet, nach modernem Maßstab durchaus auch rassistisch." Along similar lines. Hoklotubbe, "Civilized Christ-Followers" describes Titus 1:10–14 as "an invective against Cretans that trades in denigrating ethnic stereotypes" and notes that it "would be considered racist according to modern sensibilities" (369, 370).
[53] The question of the definition of racism is complicated and will not be addressed here. For preliminary reflections on the use of the notion of "racism" in relation to early Christian literature, see my "Origen of Alexandria and the History of Racism as a Theological Problem."

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that regard the passage as a pejorative ethnic stereotype or even an instance of racism.

What all three types of interpretation have in common is a concern with the text's sweeping claims about the Cretans. The negative ethnic stereotype featured in this passage is at the forefront of the exegetical debate of the last century, as interpreters have either sought to explain it away or to confront it. In what follows, I will argue that this is a remarkably recent development.

7.2 EARLY CHRISTIAN RECEPTION

Reggie Kidd claimed around the turn of the millennium that "the history of exegesis [of Titus 1:12] is preoccupied with excuse-making for or charge-leveling against Paul."[54] As the preceding analysis has shown, this is an accurate assessment of much twentieth- as well as twenty-first-century scholarship, although there are also quite a number of recent studies that simply ignore the moral questions that this text raises.[55] Kidd's statement is in any case hardly accurate as far as the lion's share of the history of interpretation is concerned. The sweeping nature and remarkable harshness of the indictment of the Cretans do not seem to have been much of a concern for a very long time. This observation is significant in terms of our evaluation of the interpretive efforts discussed above but also in relation to the larger argument pursued in this study concerning the significance of ethnic stereotypes in the context of early Christian literature. Even in the particularly derogatory case of Titus 1:12, ethnic stereotyping was not something that elicited serious qualms, let alone gave rise to fundamental objections or criticism. Early Christian interpreters saw reason neither to indict nor to vindicate Paul on this score; the generalizing claim about the Cretans' inferior character simply did not occasion much comment and if it did, it was not regarded as problematic.

Early Christianity and Classical Culture

The Cretan claim that the tomb of Zeus was located on their island was cited frequently by early Christian apologists who sought to repudiate and ridicule traditional Greek claims about the gods. Tertullian (*Apol.*

[54] Kidd, "Titus as Apologia," 189.
[55] For reflections on this phenomenon, see pp. 219–20.

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25.7), Theophilus of Antioch (*Autol.* 1.10), Clement of Alexandria (*Protr.* 2.37), Minucius Felix (*Oct.* 21.8), Tatian (*Or. Graec.* 27), Athenagoras (*Leg.* 30.3), and Origen (*Cels.* 3.43) all mention the story.[56] Tatian, Athenagoras, and Origen connect it with the mendacity of the Cretans,[57] but there is no mention of or immediate connection with Titus 1:12 in any of these passages.[58]

The earliest direct reference to Titus 1:12 is in Clement's *Stromata*, in a section that discusses the Seven Sages (the famous intellectuals and statesmen of the sixth century BCE). In his discussion of Epimenides, Clement notes that Paul "mentions [him] in the Epistle to Titus, where he says 'It was one of them, their very own prophet, who said, "Cretans are always liars, vicious brutes, lazy gluttons." That testimony is true.'" For Clement, this quotation has important implications: "Do you see how he even grants to the prophets of the Greeks a share of the truth, and is not ashamed, for the sake of edification and correction, to employ certain Greek poems in his discourse?" (*Strom.* 1.14.59).[59] The main element in Titus 1:12 of interest to Clement was evidently Paul's approving quotation of a Greek sage, as this suggested the enduring value of Hellenistic *paideia* for Christians. And in this Clement was not alone. The element of Titus 1:12 that attracted by far the most comment during the early Christian period was the quotation of a classical source. The text was regularly cited as evidence that Christians were allowed to study classical literature and to cite arguments from "pagan" authors if they proved useful.[60]

[56] See also Lactantius, *Inst.* 1.11.46; Arnobius, 4.14; Cyprian(?), *Idol.* 2; Athanasius, *C. Gent.* 10.

[57] Indicative of its widespread use is the fact that Celsus (*apud* Origen) was aware of its usage by Christian apologists. Celsus complained that the Christians "ridicule those who worship Zeus because his tomb is shown in Crete" (*Cels.* 3.43). Translation: Chadwick, *Contra Celsum*, 157.

[58] This does not mean that they were unaware of Titus 1:12. While in the case of Tatian and Athenagoras we cannot be certain that they were familiar with Titus 1:12 (according to Jerome, Tatian knew and recognized the Letter to Titus [Federica Bucchi, *S. Hieronymus presbyter: Commentarii in epistulas Pauli Apostoli ad Titum et ad Philemonem*, CCSL 77C (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), 3 ll. 18–20]), there can be no doubt in the case of Origen. His commentary on Titus is no longer extant, but he quotes Titus 1:12 at a number of other points in his extant oeuvre (see n. 60), and he was likely also familiar with the earliest patristic reference to Titus 1:12, in Clement's *Stromata*.

[59] My translation of the Greek text in Otto Stählin and Ludwig Früchtel, *Clemens Alexandrinus, Band II: Stromata, Buch I–VI*, GCS (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1960): ὁρᾷς ὅπως κἂν τοῖς Ἑλλήνων προφήταις δίδωσί τι τῆς ἀληθείας καὶ οὐκ ἐπαισχύνεται πρός τε οἰκοδομὴν καὶ πρὸς ἐντροπὴν διαλεγόμενός τινων Ἑλληνικοῖς συγχρῆσθαι ποιήμασι;

[60] Origen, *Hom. Luc.* 31.3, *Hom. Lev.* 5.7; Didymus the Blind, *In Gen.* 227.11; John Chrysostom, *Hom. Tit.* 3.1 (PG 62:677); Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 3.16.77; Jerome, *Ep.*

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Problems and Solutions

Another issue that was discussed by early Christian interpreters in relation to this passage was the source of the saying quoted in Titus 1:12. Was it Callimachus or Epimenides whom the apostle quoted? Early Christian authors were split on the attribution.[61] The question was relevant among other things because of Paul's agreement with one or both of these authors. Both Jerome and John Chrysostom raised the possibility that if Paul approvingly quoted Callimachus or Epimenides, it might follow that the Apostle also agreed with them that Zeus was immortal (and not buried in a tomb, as the Cretans allegedly maintained). For John Chrysostom this was one of many questions that this passage raised (πολλὰ ἐνταῦθά ἐστι τὰ ζητούμενα) and for which he sought to offer a solution in his homily on this passage (τὴν λύσιν ἐπαγάγωμεν). This particular issue presented a serious problem, John suggests:

> If, therefore, this testimony is true, see how great the danger is. For if the poet is correct in saying that they spoke falsely, saying that Zeus has died, as the apostle maintains, the danger is huge (μέγας ὁ κίνδυνος). Pay attention, beloved, with great precision. The prophet said that the Cretans spoke falsely in saying that Zeus was dead. The apostle confirmed his testimony. So, they say, according to the apostle Zeus is immortal, "for," Paul says, "this testimony is true." What, then, is it, and how is it possible for this to be solved (Τί οὖν ἐστι, καὶ πῶς ἔστι τοῦτο ἐπιλύσασθαι;)?[62]

Here as frequently elsewhere, Chrysostom draws on the rhetorical form of αὔξησις ("amplification") to build up the problem and raise the stakes

70.2. Cf. Athanasius, *Syn.* 39.3.5, which appears to have been influenced by Origen, *Hom. Luc.* 31.3.

[61] Epimenides is mentioned by Clement, *Strom.* 1.14.59; John Chrysostom, *Hom. Tit.* 3.1 (according to the text in PG 62:677, cf. Allen, *Homilies,* 57 n. 21); Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 3.16.77; Epiphanius, *Pan.* 2.169.15; Callimachus appears in Athenagoras (*Leg.* 30.3) and Origen (*Cels.* 3.43) as well as Theodoret (PG 82.861–62) and Theodore of Mopsuestia (TEM 2:242–43). Jerome in both *Ep.* 70.2 and *Comm. Tit.* (ad loc.) claims that the entire verse is only found in Epimenides and that the first part "The Cretans are always liars" was subsequently copied by Callimachus. Augstine opines that Paul "knew not which" Cretan had said this (*C. litt. Petil.* 2.30.69). An additional point of controversy with respect to Titus 1:12 is that the Greek author is referred to as a prophet. Jerome discusses this in his commentary on Titus and suggests that Paul called Epimenides a prophet "mockingly," implying that he was a false prophet or did so because Epimenides wrote a book entitled *Oracles*, so the designation "prophet" seemed fitting.

[62] *Hom. Tit.* 3.1. Text and translation: Allen, *Homilies*, 57–59.

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in anticipation of the solution that he will offer.[63] The rather obvious response to this problem formulated by Chrysostom (as well as Jerome) is that Paul agreed only with the particular point that he quoted and not necessarily with anything else that Epimenides or Callimachus wrote.[64]

These discussions in Jerome and Chrysostom are among many possible examples illustrating the ability and willingness of early Christian interpreters to raise critical questions about the biblical text. Much patristic commentary proceeds by identifying προβλήματα/ζητήματα/ἀπορίαι ("vexing questions"/"questions up for debate"/"points of perplexity")[65] in the text before formulating solutions (λύσεις), a form of commentary sometimes referred to as *erotapokriseis* ("questions and answers"). Illustrating the level of critique this could entail, Jerome asserts in his commentary on Titus 1:12–13 that certain people (*quidam*) had argued that "the apostle should be rebuked" (*Apostolum reprehendendum*) because Paul had proceeded "unskillfully" (*imperite*) and had "defended the gods whom he was fighting against" (*deos quos impugnabat adseruit*), that is, he had indirectly suggested that Zeus was a god, no mere human being.[66] Whether or not people actually criticized Paul on this score is not so important. What matters is that there was evidently room in patristic commentary to introduce critical comments and observations not just about the text but also about its authors. While the criticism of Paul is indirect here (Jerome attributes it to *quidam*), he elsewhere criticizes Paul more directly. Jerome was clearly perturbed by Paul's outburst in Gal 5:12 ("I wish those who unsettle you would castrate themselves") and argued that it is no wonder "if the apostle . . . should have spoken like this once. For we observe such lapses frequently in holy men."[67] Paul was not incapable of lapses in Jerome's estimation. It is notable in this light that

[63] See Margaret M. Mitchell, *John Chrysostom on Paul: Praises and Problem Passages*, Writings from the Greco-Roman World (Atlanta: SBL, 2022), 12.

[64] Jerome appealed to Titus 1:13 in support of this reading: "'This testimony is true'; not 'this entire poem' from which the 'testimony' was taken, not the entire work, but merely 'this testimony,' this brief line in which they are called liars. And assuredly he who agrees with one part of a poem should be believed to have rejected the rest." Translation: Scheck, *Commentaries*, 308.

[65] For these translations and more generally on this style of commentary, see Margaret M. Mitchell, "'Problems and Solutions' in Early Christian Biblical Interpretation: A Telling Case from Origen's Newly Discovered Greek Homilies on the Psalms (Codex Monacensis Graecus 314)," *Adamantius* 22 (2016): 40–42, and the literature cited there.

[66] Bucchi, *Commentarii*, 31; Scheck, *Commentaries*, 306–7 (adapted).

[67] Scheck, *Commentaries*, 217. Latin: *si Apostolus . . . semel fuerit hoc locutus in quod frequenter sanctos uiros cadere perspicimus* (Raspanti, *Commentarii*, 168).

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neither Jerome nor any other early commentator even entertains the possibility that "the apostle should be rebuked" because of his insensitive, sweeping statements about the Cretans. The derogatory characterization of the Cretans was never identified as a πρόβλημα requiring a λύσις. One might suppose that they never did so because there was no compelling λύσις available and they wanted to avoid outright critique of the apostle. However, not only was Jerome evidently willing to offer such criticism, the survey of exegetical opinion in the first part of this chapter has covered many possible λύσεις that interpreters of the caliber of Jerome and John Chrysostom would surely have been able to identify as well. That they did not raise the issue is therefore arguably best explained as due to a lack of concern about Titus 1:12's indictment of the Cretans.

Inborn Mendacity

In Jerome's case, it is very clear that he did not see anything wrong with Titus 1:12 in this regard. In response to the "problem" that the Apostle seemed to have lent support to the view that Zeus was immortal, Jerome argued that "he merely rebuked the mendacious Cretans for a vice that is characteristic of their nation … on account of their inborn readiness to lie" (*uitio gentis … ob ingenitam mentiendi facilitatem*).[68] Instead of excusing or sanitizing the text's ethnic prejudice, Jerome doubled down on it, and in fact went beyond Titus 1:12 by asserting that the mendacity of the Cretans was inborn or innate (*ingenitus*). While it is perhaps possible to construe Titus 1:12 as "mere" cultural criticism (the Cretans have certain customs that have resulted in all of them being beastly, lazy liars), Jerome's interpretation moves decisively toward the biological end of the spectrum by interpreting these characteristics as inborn. He affirms this view a little later on in the commentary, when he speaks of the "inborn vice of mendacity in the Cretans" (*ingenitum Cretensium uitium … mendacii*).[69] In support of these claims, Jerome refers to his commentary on Galatians:

> Now the sense in which the Cretans are branded as liars, and the Galatians as foolish, or Israel as stiff-necked, or each individual province by their own particular vice (*proprio uitio*), we have explained in [our commentary] on Paul's epistle to the Galatians. And since there is nothing more which we can bring forth here, we are content with that.[70]

[68] Bucchi, *Commentarii*, 31 ll. 703–4; Scheck, *Commentaries*, 307.
[69] Bucchi, *Commentarii*, 31 ll. 724–25; Scheck, *Commentaries*, 308.
[70] Bucchi, *Commentarii*, 31 ll. 735–39; Scheck, *Commentaries*, 308 (adapted).

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This brings us full circle to the Introduction of this book, which commenced with Jerome's discussion of the "foolishness" of the Galatians. Jerome's claim that this refers to the "particular vice" of the inhabitants of this province (as opposed to their departure from Paul's version of the gospel) was supported by him by appealing to the apostle's statement in Titus 1:12 as well as to a number of other authorities:

> This passage can be understood in two ways: either he has called the Galatians "senseless," a people who are going from greater things to inferior things, because they began in the spirit and are finishing in the flesh; or, he says this owing to the fact that each province has its own particular characteristics. The apostle approves as true the saying of the poet Epimenides, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." The Latin historian stamps the Moors as vain and the Dalmatians as savage. All the poets scourge the Phrygians as cowards. Philosophers boast that the finer minds are born in Athens. And with Caesar, Cicero suggests that the Greeks are capricious, when he says, "either of the capricious Greeks or of savage barbarians," and in *Pro Flacco* he says: "inborn capriciousness and learned vanity." All Scripture convicts Israel of having hard hearts and stiff necks. In this manner, then, I think the apostle too has stamped the Galatians as possessing a particular characteristic of their region.[71]

For Jerome, Titus 1:12 offered clear apostolic approval for thinking in terms of ethnic stereotypes. Although other authorities (Caesar, Cicero, and Sallust)[72] are invoked as well, Titus 1:12 is arguably the most important piece of evidence in support of his interpretation of "foolish Galatians." Not only was Titus 1:12 part of Jerome's Bible, but he took for granted that it was authored by the same person as the one who wrote Galatians.

Jerome's comments are in large part derived from Tertullian, who wrote in *De anima* 20.3: "Yet the fact of ethnic characteristics is indeed common knowledge. The comic poets ridicule the Phrygians for being cowards; Sallust attacks the vain Mauri and fierce Dalmatians; and even the apostle brands the Cretans as liars."[73] Jerome, who had read

[71] Scheck, *Commentaries*, 110–11 (adapted).

[72] That Sallust is the *latinus historicus* mentioned by Jerome is confirmed by the parallel passage in Tertullian, *An.* 20.3. A reasonable case can be made that the claim about the Dalmatians derives from fragment 2.37 of Sallust's *Histories* (Patrick McGushin, *Sallust: The Histories, Volume 1* [Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1992], 49, 202–3). The statement about the Mauri may be inspired by *Bell. Jug.* 80.6. For further discussion, see Andrew Cain, "Tertullian, Cyprian, and Lactantius in Jerome's Commentary on Galatians," *Revue d'études Augustiniennes et Patristiques* 55 (2009): 39.

[73] My translation of the Latin text in J.H. Waszink, *Quinti Septimi Florentis Tertulliani De Anima* (Amsterdam: Meulenhof, 1947): *Tamen uulgata iam res est gentilium proprietatum. Comici phrygas timidos inludunt, sallustius uanos mauros et feroces dalmatos pulsat, mendaces cretas etiam apostolus inurit*. On Jerome's dependence on Tertullian

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Tertullian, presumably took these four examples directly from his treatise.[74] For both Tertullian and Jerome, the ethnic slur of Titus 1:12 was not at all problematic but quite useful; it matched their ethnographic outlook and offered apostolic approval for accepting and utilizing traditional ethnic stereotypes.

Pauline Invective

Other early Christian authors likewise registered no qualms about Titus 1:12's indictment of the Cretans. They either did not discuss it, or, in the case of Ambrosiaster, simply affirmed that the Cretans were like this.[75] To the best of my knowledge, the only early Christian interpreter to indicate some real sense of concern about the generalizing insults of Titus 1:12 was John Chrysostom. In *De laudibus sancti Pauli*, he wrote:

> [It] wasn't only in boasting that he was like this, but also in insulting (οὐκ ἐν τῷ καυχᾶσθαι δὲ μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν τῷ ὑβρίζειν τοιοῦτος ἦν). Although it had been forbidden to insult a brother (Mt 5:22), Paul used this practice, too, in such a fitting manner that he is more esteemed for it than are those who speak in praise. Notice how for this reason he calls the Galatians stupid, not once, but twice (Gal 3:1, 3) and Cretans "lazy gluttons" and "wicked beasts" (Tit 1:12), and is awarded praise for it. For he gave us a limit and a standard, so that we might not employ too much solicitation with those who are neglectful of God, but practice a more combative form of speech. The proper measure of all things resides in him. Indeed, for this reason Paul is highly esteemed in everything he does and says, in both insulting and praising (καὶ ὑβρίζων καὶ ἐπαινῶν), abandoning and soliciting, exalting himself and speaking modestly, boasting and lowering himself. And why should you be surprised if insult and reviling receive esteem (εἰ ὕβρις καὶ λοιδορία εὐδοκιμεῖ), when murder and deceit and guile were esteemed in both the Old and the New Testaments? (5.16)[76]

at this point, see Cain, "Tertullian, Cyprian, and Lactantius in Jerome's Commentary on Galatians"; Y.-M. Duval, "Gerolamo tra Tertulliano e Origene," in *Motivi letterari ed esegetici in Gerolamo: Atti del Convegno tenuto a Trento il 5–7 dicembre 1995*, ed. Claudio Moreschini and Giovanni Menestrina (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1997), 107–35.

[74] Note also that Tertullian states in what immediately precedes that "in Athens eloquent and bright people [are born]," which is also mentioned by Jerome.

[75] Vogels, *Ambrosiastri qui dicitur Commentarius in epistulas Paulinas (ad Galatas, ad Efesios, ad Filippenses, ad Colosenses, ad Thesalonicenses, ad Timotheum, ad Titum, ad Filemonem)*, 325 l. 17: *tales erant et Cretenses*.

[76] Text and translation: Mitchell, *John Chrysostom on Paul*, 778–81. Note that in *Hom. Tit.* 1, Chrysostom also addresses the problem of Paul insulting an entire ethnic group. Here, however, he seems primarily concerned with Paul's comments about the Jews: "He also takes aim against the Jews, and if he censures the whole nation, don't be surprised (Εἰ δὲ καὶ ὁλόκληρον τὸ ἔθνος ὑβρίζει, μὴ θαυμάσῃς), for he did the same, too, in the case of the

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Chrysostom is aware that Titus 1:12 contains harsh abuse of the Cretans for which Paul could conceivably be censured on the basis of Matthew 5:22.[77] Yet for Chrysostom, the insults hurled at the Galatians and the Cretans were not grounds for rebuking the apostle but rather for praising him.[78] Paul had mastered the art of rhetorical invective (ψόγος),[79] Chrysostom suggests, and by engaging in invective to the degree that he did, he established the boundaries of good practice: "He gave us a limit and a standard, so that we might not employ too much solicitation with those who are neglectful of God, but practice a more combative form of speech." Paul's harsh claim about the Cretans was not something to repudiate but to imitate.

7.3 MODERN RECEPTION

The absence of any real concern about the ethnic insult in Titus 1:12 extended beyond late antiquity into the medieval and early modern periods. Thomas Aquinas followed the predominant early Christian line of interpretation by taking the passage as evidence for the legitimacy of quoting non-Christian sources.[80] Calvin makes the same point and additionally notes that there is "no doubt that the Cretans ... were very

Galatians, saying 'O foolish Galatians' [Gal 3:1] – not from a censorious temper but from an affectionate one (οὐχ ὑβριστικοῦ δὲ τοῦτο ἤθους, ἀλλ' ἐρωτικοῦ). I mean, if he'd done this on his own account, one would rightly blame him, but if it was from the fervor of his zeal for the gospel, he didn't do this censoriously (ὑβριστικῶς). Christ, too, on myriad occasions reproached (ἐλοιδορεῖτο) the scribes and Pharisees, but not on his own account—no, because they were ruining everyone else." Text and translation: Allen, *Homilies*, 22–23.

[77] Although Chrysostom does not explain his reasons for singling out Gal 3:1, 3 and Titus 1:12, it is notable that he selected two passages that connect an insult with an ethnic marker. Note that these two texts are also mentioned in conjunction by Jerome and Tertullian in the passages quoted above. Epiphanius, *Anc.* 77.2 similarly lists them in close succession and also adds "Ephraim is a foolish dove" (Hos 7:11), yet another example of a combination of an insult and an ethnic marker.

[78] This conforms to a broader pattern in John's oeuvre, as he "praises Paul at times by celebrating precisely what his opponents and interlocutors, both Christian and non-Christian, find blameworthy: his apparent inconsistency, his boasting, or his bellicosity" (Mitchell, *John Chrysostom on Paul*, 5).

[79] For ψόγος and ψέγειν as functional equivalents of the terms that Chrysostom uses (ὕβρις, λοιδορία, and cognates), see Pollux, *Onom.* 4.33: καὶ τὰ πράγματα ψόγος ... ὕβρις, λοιδορία; 5.117: τὸ ἐναντίον (of praise is) ψόγος, λοιδορία ...; Hesychius, *Lexicon* ψ.96: ψέγει· μέμφεται, ὑβρίζει; Clement of Alexandria, *Paed.* 1.9.80: Λοιδορία δέ ἐστι ψόγος ἐπιτεταμένος ("Abuse is intensified invective").

[80] Fabian Larcher and Matthew Lamb, *St. Thomas Aquinas: Commentary on the Letters of Saint Paul to the Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* (Lander: Emmaus Academic, 2012), 426.

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wicked men," because "the apostle . . . would not have spoken so harshly of the Cretans without the best of reasons." Calvin stresses that this judgment did not apply to "a few individuals," noting that "the whole nation is condemned."[81] Despite the inherent implausibility of an ethnic group consisting solely or even primarily of mendacious, rapacious, and gluttonous individuals, many readers from late antiquity and well into the modern period had little difficulty taking Titus 1:12 as a straightforward and accurate description of the character of the inhabitants of Crete.

The earliest example of a clear objection that I have been able to identify is the following, seventeenth-century passage written by the physician, artist, and polymath Sir Thomas Browne, in which he in fact claims that no one had previously raised this issue:

> There is another offence unto charity, which no author hath ever written of, and few take notice of, and that's the reproach, not of whole professions, mysteries, and conditions, but of whole nations, wherein by opprobrious epithets we miscal each other, and, by an uncharitable logick, from a disposition in a few, conclude a habit in all . . . St. Paul, that calls the Cretians liars, doth it but indirectly, and upon quotation of their own poet. It is as bloody a thought in one way as Nero's was in another. For by a word we wound a thousand, and at one blow assassin the honour of a nation.[82]

Sir Browne was evidently critical of "reproaching whole nations" and viewed Titus 1:12 as a prime example of this questionable practice, but he softened his criticism somewhat by stating that Paul condemned the Cretans "but indirectly, and upon quotation of their own poet." Still, it is clear that Browne was disconcerted by Titus 1:12's sweeping generalization of the Cretans. It is no coincidence that Browne wrote in the seventeenth century. As Siep Stuurman has argued, it was during this time – at least as far as Europe is concerned – that "truly universalistic notions of equality, transcending religion, rank, gender, and sometimes even ethnicity and race, were articulated for the first time."[83]

[81] John Calvin, *The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians, and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon*, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. T. A. Smail, Calvin's New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 363–64.

[82] *Religio Medici*, part 2, section 4, quoted from Kevin Killeen, ed., *Thomas Browne: Selected Writings*, 21st-Century Oxford Authors (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 65–66. On the life and times of Browne, see Reid Barbour, *Sir Thomas Browne: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[83] Siep Stuurman, *The Invention of Humanity: Equality and Cultural Difference in World History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 22. Stuurman notes that this

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The fact that Paul himself offered one of the best-known instances of thinking in terms of national sins meant, however, that rejecting this notion was fraught with difficulty. For some, Titus 1:12 provided key evidence that thinking along these lines was acceptable. Andrew (André) Le Mercier, Huguenot Pastor in Boston, wrote in 1733:

> Should any one demand whether or no it be lawful to speak ill of Nations in general, and whole Bodies, of what Profession soever they be; I answer, that doubtless it is lawful to speak in general, because among so great a Number there will certainly be found some honest Persons. If for Instance, I say that the Spaniards are haughty and lazy, I do not still intend but that there be humble & laborious Persons among 'em. S. Paul gives us an Example and Prof of what I advance. He did not stick to say that the Cretians or Candians[84] are always Liars, slow Bellies. Yet still it must be remembred, that all which is lawful is not always proper and expedient; and that all Things do not edify. Thus if we have Reason to fear that any one will be offended at what we say ill of his Nation or Profession in general, or that any other Inconvenience may arise therefrom, we ought to refrain speaking.[85]

Le Mercier is ambivalent about speaking "ill of Nations in general," because he defends the practice by assuming that it always necessarily allows for exceptions (which, of course, need not be the case) and argues that it should be avoided if "we have Reason to fear that any one will be offended at what we say ill of his Nation," which implies that one should generally eschew such statements. To reject speaking "ill of Nations" outright, however, would be to condemn the Apostle, who "gives us an Example and Prof" of its acceptability in Titus 1:12.[86] Still, quoting Paul

"invention of modern equality was paralleled by the invention of new and equally modern discourses of inequality" (259).

[84] The inhabitants of Candia, present-day Heraklion, a major city on Crete.

[85] Andrew Le Mercier, *A Treatise against Detraction, in Ten Sections*. (Boston: Daniel Henchman, 1733), 184–85. For more on Le Mercier, see Paula Wheeler Carlo, "Huguenot Identity and Protestant Unity in Colonial Massachusetts: The Reverend André Le Mercier and the 'Sociable Spirit,'" *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 40 (2012): 123–47.

[86] Others agreed that Titus 1:12 constituted the key "Example and Prof" in support of generalizing and essentializing claims about ethnic groups. E.g., John Weemes, *The Christian Synagogue: Wherein Is Contained the Diverse Reading, the Right Pointing, Translation, and Collation of Scripture with Scripture [Etc.]*, 4th ed. (London: Cotes, 1633), 296, argues that there is such a thing as *vitium gentis* and quotes Titus 1:12 in support but nuances it a bit by defining this category as "[this] is when a Country is much given to sinne, but not universally." See also Juan Huartes, *Examen de Ingenios, or, The Tryal of Wits: Discovering the Great Difference of Wits among Men, and What Sort of Learning Suits Best with Each Genius* (London: Richard Sare, 1698), 88: "In one Province the Men are Valiant, in another, Cowards; in this, Deliberate; in that, Rash;

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against himself, Le Mercier argues that it may be lawful, but not necessarily expedient or edifying (1 Cor 10:23, cf. 6:12), and that one should refrain from such generalizing claims if it causes offense (1 Cor 10:32, cf. 8:13, 10:28–29). It would seem to follow that they must virtually always be avoided.

Following in the line of Sir Browne and others, many readers became increasingly uneasy about generalizing and essentializing statements about ethnic groups. In commentaries published in the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, qualms about the sweeping indictment of the Cretans in Titus 1:12 are occasionally reflected in interpretive efforts similar to those analyzed in Section 7.1.

Johann Albrecht Bengel wrote as early as 1742, "testimonies of the wickedness of the Cilicians were also brought forward, but by others [not by one of themselves, as in the case of the Cretans]; therefore Paul, a Cilician, might quote this without reproach."[87] Whatever one makes of the merits of this argument – Cilicians like Paul were insulted, so he is allowed to insult others as well – the passage reflects a sense of unease about Paul's claim regarding the wickedness of the Cretans. This is true too of the "exceptions argument," which is offered in various nineteenth-century commentaries and studies. Patrick Fairbairn, a minister in the Free Church of Scotland, for instance, claimed that "the description, of course, is to be understood as applying only in the general to the Cretan population, while admitting, doubtless of many individual exceptions."[88] Few authors, though, expressed their unease as directly as did George Findlay, quoted in the introduction of this chapter, although even he phrased his objections primarily from what anachronistically might be called a "reader response" point of view: "The passage, so far as it goes,

in one, lovers of Truth; in another, Lyars; according to that of the Apostle, *The Cretians are always lyars, evil Beasts, slow Bellies*" (emphasis original); Francis Bacon also appealed to Titus 1:12 in this connection. A. J. Hoenselaars, *Images of Englishmen and Foreigners in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries: A Study of Stage Characters and National Identity in English Renaissance Drama, 1558–1642* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1992), 24, offers this summary: "Bacon does not exclude considerations of group character or national character from his moral philosophy; indeed, he explicitly accepts such generalizations. He finds authority in St. Paul's letter to Titus where the apostle recommends that severe discipline should be applied to the Cretans, since 'the Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies.'"

[87] Quoting here from the ET of his famous *Gnomon Novi Testamenti*: *Gnomon of the NT*, vol. 4 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1858), 320.

[88] Patrick Fairbairn, *The Pastoral Epistles: The Greek Text and Translation with Introduction, Expository Notes, and Dissertations* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1874), 266.

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and taken as it generally is . . . as a true description of the Cretan national character, is certainly apt to scandalize the thoughtful and sensitive reader."[89]

Throughout the nineteenth century, the more common way to deal with this passage was to affirm (indeed, in many cases, to double down on) the accuracy of the depiction of the Cretans. Such passages regularly appear in works written for a general audience, including works specifically for families and children. *The Portable Folio Family Bible* of 1851, for instance, informs its readers – with some relish, it would seem – that the Cretans "united the subtlety of the fox, the venom of the serpent, or the fierceness of wolves and tigers, with the greediness and inactivity of swine."[90] Rather than a slur or an insult, Titus 1:12 was taken as an accurate description of their collective character, even if it was difficult to explain how the Cretans had developed such extreme traits: "It is not easy to determine, from what occurrence of circumstances the Cretans obtained so odious and contemptible a national character."[91] The *Commentary for Schools* informs its young readers that "this terrible estimate of the national Cretan character is amply borne out by the testimony of many profane writers." Paul "endorses the very severe judgment . . . on the national Cretan character" with good reason: "He had lived long enough in their midst to be able to bear his grave testimony to the truth of Epimenides' words."[92]

Paul's endorsement of the testimony of "many profane writers" suggested that the "national Cretan character" had remained constant over the span of many years. As Francis Bourdillon, rector of All Halllows church in Woolbeding put it in a study published in 1875: "The Cretan character was still such as it had been six hundred years before."[93] Just as

[89] Findlay, "The Reproach of the Cretans," 403.

[90] Walter M'Gilvray, *The Portable Folio Family Bible* (Glasgow: M'Phun, 1851), ad loc.

[91] M'Gilvray, *The Portable Folio Family Bible*, ad loc.

[92] H. D. M. Spence, "Titus," in *The New Testament Commentary for Schools: The Epistles to Titus, Philemon, the Hebrews and the Epistle of St. James*, ed. C. J. Ellicott (London: Cassell & Co., 1879), 15. Spence (1836–1917; Spence Jones from 1904 onwards) was a well-known Anglican clergyman, author and academic, who ended his career as Professor of Ancient History at the Royal Academy. The editor of the series, Charles John Ellicott, was an influential figure as well. He served as professor of New Testament at King's College and Hulsean Professor at Cambridge. Ellicott subsequently became bishop of Gloucester, where Spence was dean at the time. See Nigel Scotland, "Ellicott, Charles John (1819–1905), Bishop of Gloucester," in *ODNB* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[93] Francis William Bourdillon, *Lesser Lights: Or, Some of the Minor Characters of Scripture Traced with a View to Instruction and Example* (London; New York: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge; E. & J. B. Young, 1875), 296.

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the combined testimony of classical sources and Paul's letter intimated that the Galatian character had consistently remained fickle over the course of centuries (Chapter 4) and that licentiousness was a trait inherent in the Corinthians (Chapter 5), in the case of Titus 1:12 it suggested that the mendacity and viciousness of the Cretans had a timeless quality as well. According to various commentators, the Cretan character had remained essentially unchanged up until the present day. For instance, William Sime, having cited Polybius and Homer, writes:

> In the apostle Paul's time, their vicious practices seem to have been little if at all changed .... Nor are the inhabitants of this island reclaimed from these vices till the present time. "The Candiotes of the present day," says Hartley, "are precisely what they were in the days of St Paul. The Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, slow belies."[94]

The reference is to John Hartley who published his *Researches in Greece and the Levant* in 1831 and a revised, second edition in 1833. Hartley reports on the basis of his extensive travels that the Cretans remained in his day "notoriously ... the worst characters in the Levant."[95] Sime was by no means the only biblical scholar to appeal to Hartley to support the validity of Paul's claim,[96] and Hartley was not the only contemporary

[94] William Sime, *Sacred Geography, or a Dictionary Historical and Descriptive of Every Place Mentioned in the Bible* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, 1835), 149.

[95] John Hartley, *Researches in Greece and the Levant*, 2nd ed. cor. and rev. (London: Seeley and Burnside, 1833), 98. One piece of evidence he cites in support of this assessment is worth quoting since it directly invokes Titus 1:12: "The Greek Admiral Miaoules (= Andreas Vokos, 1765–1835) happening to be in company with a Candiote, joked him on the character of his island. 'Ah, you Cretans, we know what sort of men you are. St. Paul has given you your character, long since: *The Cretians are always liars*.' The Candiote attempted to parry the satire, by urging the reply: 'Yes, but David says, in the book of Psalms, *All men are liars*.' 'True,' rejoined Miaoules, 'but David does not say, *All men are ALWAYS liars;* whereas St. Paul says, *The Cretians are ALWAYS liars*." (emphases original). The Cretan's appeal to the Psalms has been replicated in recent scholarship (see p. 190), without however registering the important distinction that Miaoules makes.

[96] See also, e.g., William Goodhugh, *The Bible Cyclopaedia: Or, Illustrations of the Civil and Natural History of the Sacred Writings* (London: J. W. Parker, 1841), 1:318; John Brown, "Crete," in *A Dictionary of the Bible* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, 1866), 172; D. D. Whedon, *Commentary on the New Testament, Intended for Popular Use. Volume V: Titus-Revelation* (New York, Cincinnati: Phillips & Hunt; Walden & Stowe, 1880), 7. The latter did allow for some minor improvement of the Cretans over the course of time due to their exposure to Christianity: "It is sad to remark, that the Christianity of Paul and Titus proved hardly more successful in forming the Cretan character to a high model .... As through the ages Christian civilization has advanced, Crete has, doubtless, advanced; yet preserving the same sad relative immorality amid surrounding peoples" (8).

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traveler to report that the Cretans remained as Paul described them. Bayard Taylor, a popular American poet and author of travel literature,[97] wrote in 1850 in his *Travels in Greece and Russia: With an Excursion to Crete*: "[Titus 1:12] is just as true at the present day, as applied to the Cretan Christians, and to many, but not all, of the Turks. I scarcely know which disgusted me more, during the journey – the beastly manner of life of the Cretans, their filthy bodily habits, or their brazen falsehood and egregious vanity."[98]

But there were other voices as well. The French physician and botanist Joseph Pitton de Tournefort (1656–1708) visited Crete in the early eighteenth century and having cited Paul and other ancient authorities he countered that "the present race is not so bad."[99] Tournefort's language perhaps does not mean "the race of the Cretans at present is not so bad" but rather "the race currently inhabiting Crete is not so bad," because he thought of the inhabitants of Crete in his day as "Greeks" and "Turks." Still, Tournefort's comments potentially conflicted with Paul's claim that the Cretans were always liars. Fortunately, a solution was ready at hand. James MacKnight wrote in his commentary on Titus: "Mr Tournefort, who visited Crete in the beginning of this century, tells us ... that its present inhabitants are more virtuous. The gospel, it seems, hath led them to change their manners."[100] A comparable strategy is at work in the report by Robert Pashley, a Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, of a journey that took place in 1834. After enjoying the kindness and the hospitality of the locals, he writes: "I began to suspect that, whatever the ancient Cretans may have been, from the time of Polybius to that of St Paul, the present race can hardly deserve the bad character bestowed on

[97] James D. Hart, "Taylor, [James] Bayard (1825–78)," *The Concise Oxford Companion to American Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 394–95.

[98] Bayard Taylor, *Travels in Greece and Russia, with an Excursion to Crete* (New York: Putnam, 1850), 132. See also the earlier reports of travels by Jerome Dandini in 1599 and George Sandys in 1610 briefly discussed in Otto F. A. Meinardus, "Cretan Traditions about St. Paul's Mission to the Island," *Ostkirchliche Studien* 22 (1973): 175, which likewise affirm the accuracy of Titus 1:12 as a description of the contemporary inhabitants of Crete.

[99] Joseph Pitton de Tournefort, *A Voyage into the Levant*, trans. John Ozell, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 66. French original: *Relation d'un voyage du Levant* (1717).

[100] James Macknight, *A New Literal Translation from the Original Greek of All the Apostolical Epistles: With a Commentary and Notes Philological, Critical, Explanatory, and Practical, to Which Is Added a History of the Life of the Apostle Paul*, vol. 3 (London: Longman, Hurst, Reese, and Orme, 1809), 280.

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their ancestors."[101] The tension between Paul's claim and present-day reality was resolved not by directly questioning the apostle's judgment but by appealing to the long period of time that had elapsed, allowing for substantial improvement on the Cretans' part.[102]

The formulation "I began to suspect" that Paul's assessment no longer applied, reveals the impact of Titus 1:12 on Pashley's expectations: He expected to encounter people who conformed to Paul's description. Chapter 2 discussed how such expectations contribute substantially to the longevity of stereotypes as a result of confirmation bias. We expect people to be a certain way and readily notice data that confirms that judgment, while not registering contradictory evidence as well. This dynamic may well explain the claims of Hartley, Taylor, and others[103] that nineteenth-century Cretans were much like Paul described them. Pashley's realization that the Cretans that he encountered did not match this stereotypical image is happy testimony to the fact that confirmation bias is not all-powerful. If the level of cognitive dissonance between what is expected and what is observed is substantial enough, the stereotype will be adapted or rejected. The extreme nature of the claims made in Titus 1:12 likely facilitated this process; it is easier to retain a negative assessment in the face of contradictory evidence if the claim is less absolute. "Many Cretans are prone to lie," is an assessment that can still be accepted even after meeting several truthful Cretans; "Cretans are always liars," by contrast, is a view more difficult to uphold once one interacts with real-life Cretans.

CONCLUSION

Interpretation of Titus 1:12 in the twentieth and twenty-first century has frequently been preoccupied with the text's sweeping claim about the Cretans' character. Many scholars have devised interpretations that either deny that Paul is engaging in ethnic stereotyping or identify extenuating circumstances, with a limited number of scholars writing in the last few decades taking a more critical stance and identifying the text as an ethnic slur or even an instance of ancient racism. Regardless of their position,

[101] Robert Pashley, *Travels in Crete*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Murray, 1837), 35.

[102] The similarity in strategy is probably not coincidental, since Pashley was familiar with Tournefort's work, which he cites regularly in his *Travels in Crete*.

[103] E.g., S. G. W. Benjamin, "Historical Sketch of Crete," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 34 (1867): 763: "They have not outlived their disreputable character."

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these scholars are addressing an aspect of the text that was not experienced as problematic for much of the history of interpretation. The offense present-day readers experience when reading Titus 1:12, and the tension they observe between Christian egalitarian ideals and labeling an ethnic group perpetual liars, evil beasts, and lazy bellies reflects a relatively recent sensibility.

Early Christian authors raised questions about various aspects of the text, including its approving citation of a "pagan" author, but hardly signal concern about the sweeping and harsh characterization of the people of Crete. To the extent that they commented on this aspect of Titus 1:12, they expressed approval and qualified it as a manner of speech that warranted imitation rather than rejection.

Various recent interpretations reflect the assumption that such a hurtful assessment of the Cretan people cannot possibly be what the apostle Paul or one of his early imitators sought to convey. The early reception history of Titus 1:12 offers no support for this line of reasoning. Not only did early Christians not read the text in any of the creative ways suggested by recent exegetes, they also, more fundamentally, did not share any sense that the sweeping indictment of the Cretans was problematic. If early Christians did not see much wrong with such statements about ethnic groups, it stands to reason that this was true also for the early Christ-follower who penned Titus 1:12. There is, in other words, no good historical reason for assuming that the Pauline author would have been unable or unwilling to offer such an indictment of the Cretans and that Titus 1:12 must therefore be construed differently. The early reception history of Titus 1:12 accordingly strengthens readings that take the verse as a description of the Cretan people and either take that assessment as historically accurate (an interpretive option facing obvious problems of its own) or recognize it as a deeply negative ethnic stereotype.

Only starting in the early modern period did Titus 1:12 begin to occasion serious "inward trouble," as George Findlay would put it in the nineteenth century. Commentators and other intellectuals became increasingly uneasy with generalizing claims about ethnic groups. Yet the fact that the apostle engaged in this type of discourse in Titus 1:12 was a powerful argument for continuing to do so, at least under certain circumstances. This legitimizing effect of Titus 1:12 can already be observed much earlier. For Tertullian and Jerome, Titus 1:12 functioned as apostolic approval for thinking in generalizing, essentializing, and often deeply negative ways not just about the Cretans but other ethnic groups as well. As in other instances discussed in previous chapters, the

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fact that the apostle's assessment lined up with that of authors who lived several centuries earlier (as well as later) confirmed for Pauline interpreters that these characteristics were highly stable. That such assessments influenced ethnic relations in the real world is evident from travel reports from the nineteenth century that indicate that travelers to Crete assumed and in several cases affirmed that the Cretans were just as Paul described them.

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