1

Introduction

In his *Commentary on Galatians*, Jerome offers the following interpretation of Galatians 3:1, the infamous verse in which Paul calls the Galatians "foolish" or "senseless" (ἀνόητοι):

> This passage can be understood in two ways: either he has called the Galatians "senseless" (*insensatos*), 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 (*quod unaquaeque prouincia suas habeat proprietates*).[1]

The second interpretive possibility introduced here, that Paul called the Galatians foolish because of the "particular characteristics" of their province, is affirmed by Jerome later on: "I think the apostle too has stamped the Galatians as possessing a particular characteristic of their region (*regio*)."[2] Jerome explained the origins of this characteristic ("senselessness") by appealing to the Galatians' migratory history. The Galatians had migrated to Asia Minor all the way from Gaul, which Jerome deemed "not surprising" given that in the opposite direction "throngs from the

[1] *Comm. Gal.* Book 1, Gal 3:1; translation: Thomas P. Scheck, *St. Jerome's Commentaries on Galatians, Titus, and Philemon* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 110–11 (adapted). Latin text: Giacomo Raspanti, *S. Hieronymi presbyteri opera. Pars I. Opera Exegetica 6. Commentarii in epistulam Pauli Apostoli ad Galatas*, CCSL (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 65. Jerome initially presents multiple possible interpretations, which is typical of his style of commentary. See Giacomo Raspanti, *Girolamo di Stridone: Commento alla Epistola ai Galati*, CCSL (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 26–28.

[2] *Comm. Gal.* Book 1, Gal 3:1; Scheck, *Commentaries*, 111 (adapted); Raspanti, *Commentarii*, 65.

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east and from Greece had reached the limits of the west."[3] These migratory patterns explained for Jerome why "even in the West, minds of Greek acumen may often be found, and in the East minds are redolent of barbaric stupidity."[4] The Galatians were foolish because, though currently residing in Anatolia, they hailed from the western region of Gaul. Jerome concluded: "It is not surprising that the Galatians have been called foolish and slow to understand, since even Hilary, a man of the Rhone, himself a Gaul and a native of Poitiers, says in a poem found among his hymns that the Gauls are stupid."[5]

It was not only Paul's letter to the Galatians that in Jerome's judgment referred to the "particular characteristics" of the local population to which the apostle wrote. Jerome asserted that "the apostle identifies *each province* by its own particular characteristics."[6] Jerome uses *prouincia, regio*, and *gens* interchangeably in this context, suggesting that he did not draw any sharp distinctions between the population of regions, the inhabitants of Roman provinces, and ethnic groups.[7] To buttress the claim that Paul's letters inform the reader about the characteristics of such groups, Jerome turned to the letters to the Romans, Corinthians, and Thessalonians.[8] The collective character of the inhabitants of these places was not only clearly defined but also quite stable, Jerome argued. Even "until the present day" – in 386 CE, more than three centuries after Paul wrote – "the same vestiges remain, whether of virtues or of errors."[9]

In contrast to Jerome, contemporary New Testament scholarship has shown rather limited interest in the extent to which Pauline letters express

[3] *Comm. Gal.* pref. Book 2; Scheck, *Commentaries*, 126; Raspanti, *Commentarii*, 79.
[4] *Comm. Gal.* pref. Book 2; Scheck, *Commentaries*, 127; Raspanti, *Commentarii*, 79.
[5] *Comm. Gal.* pref. Book 2; Scheck, *Commentaries*, 126; Raspanti, *Commentarii*, 80.
[6] *Comm. Gal.* pref. Book 2; Scheck, *Commentaries*, 128 (adapted); Raspanti, *Commentarii*, 80: *unamquamque prouinciam suis proprietatibus denotarit.*
[7] For *prouincia* and *regio*, see the two initial quotations above. In pref. Book 2 (Scheck, *Commentaries*, 125; Raspanti, *Commentarii*, 78), Jerome refers back to this discussion by saying: "It seems that now in the second book of the *Commentary on Galatians* I need to return to things I left untouched in the first book, when I was discussing the particular characteristics of the nations/peoples (*de gentium proprietatibus*)."
[8] Although Jerome's use of *prouincia, regio*, and *gens* suggests that his discussion would focus on the characteristics of the general population of these places, many of the examples he cites apply specifically to the local Christian community. By largely eliding the distinction between the two, Jerome developed what Todd Berzon has aptly termed "a fused theological-ethnographic framework." Todd S. Berzon, "'O, Foolish Galatians': Imagining Pauline Community in Late Antiquity," *Church History* 85 (2016): 449.
[9] Scheck, *Commentaries*, 128; Raspanti, *Commentarii*, 80: *Vsque hodie eadem uel uirtutum uestigia permanent uel errorum.*

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or reflect assumptions about the collective character of the ethnic, regional, and local groups they address or otherwise mention. This is the case despite the fact that a good deal of important work has recently been published on ethnicity in early Christianity. In the context of the study of Paul, the implications of his Jewish ethnic identity have for some time now been central to important discussions in the field.[10] Another, similarly significant, strand of scholarship has focused on early Christian self-definition in ethnic terms, as a "new people" or "third race."[11] However, outgroups (i.e., groups that the author does not belong to) have received comparatively short shrift. To the extent that this has been addressed in the study of Paul, the focus has been on his attitude toward Gentiles, that is, the undifferentiated mass of non-Jews. While this restrictive emphasis is understandable, following as it does Paul's own rhetoric that often divides humanity into Jews and Gentiles,[12] it fails to do justice to the multiethnic context of the Roman empire.[13]

In an effort to address this lacuna, I propose to explore in this study the use and function of ethnic stereotypes in the Pauline letter archive. There

[10] See, e.g., Pamela Eisenbaum, *Paul Was Not a Christian: The Real Message of a Misunderstood Apostle* (New York: HarperOne, 2009); Mark D. Nanos and Magnus Zetterholm, eds., *Paul within Judaism: Restoring the First-Century Context to the Apostle* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015); Paula Fredriksen, *Paul: The Pagans' Apostle* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2017); Matthew Thiessen, *A Jewish Paul: The Messiah's Herald to the Gentiles* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2023); Matthew V. Novenson, *Paul and Judaism at the End of History* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2024).

[11] Denise K. Buell, *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005) has been an especially influential contribution. Other important studies of ethnicity in relation to early Christian literature include Judith M. Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Caroline E. Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs: A Study of Kinship and Ethnicity in the Letters of Paul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); David G. Horrell, *Ethnicity and Inclusion: Religion, Race, and Whiteness in Constructions of Jewish and Christian Identities* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020).

[12] Adi Ophir and Ishay Rosen-Zvi, *Goy: Israel's Multiple Others and the Birth of the Gentile* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), argue that Paul *invented* the Jew–Gentile binary. While I am not persuaded that Paul is introducing something novel, their work effectively demonstrates that this binary assumes notable prominence in Paul's letters in comparison to other Jewish literature.

[13] On Paul's dichotomous Jew/Gentile rhetoric in relation to the ethnic diversity of the Greco-Roman world, see Christopher D. Stanley, "The Ethnic Context of Paul's Letters," in *Christian Origins and Hellenistic Judaism: Social and Literary Contexts for the New Testament*, Texts and Editions for New Testament Study 10 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2013), 177–201. On ethnicity in the Roman empire, see also pp. 23–27 below.

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are two main reasons to suspect that ethnic stereotypes are relevant to this body of literature. The first such reason is that a wealth of recent research in the field of social cognition (i.e., "the study of the mental processes involved in perceiving, attending to, remembering, thinking about, and making sense of the people in our social world")[14] has demonstrated that ethnic stereotypes exert a great deal of influence on social interactions. "Ethnic stereotype" is used in this context to refer to culturally shared knowledge, beliefs, and expectations about members of an ethnic group.[15] Social cognitive studies have shown that ethnic stereotypes, defined along these lines, are ubiquitous and mundane elements of human interaction and are by no means the exclusive province of bigots and racists. They influence, in often quite subtle ways, how people perceive, evaluate, and remember social situations. Although based on empirical research in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, these insights are in general outline applicable to Paul, because they pertain to the cognitive processes to which all human beings are subject, rather than select individuals alone. The chronological and cultural distance separating us from Paul does not constitute an insurmountable hurdle in this regard. The content of stereotypes is heavily culturally contingent, the ways in which the human brain depends on stereotypes to process the social world is not.

A second reason to hypothesize that ethnic stereotypes are relevant in connection to Pauline literature is that whereas today many people are skeptical of the validity of ethnic stereotypes and actively seek to inhibit their influence, generalizing and essentializing assessments of ethnic and related groups were common and uncontroversial in much of the ancient world. Greek and Latin texts roughly contemporaneous with Paul's letters regularly feature such claims about ethnic groups. Polemo of Laodicea, for instance, asserted that "the people of Scythia are a treacherous and immoral people," and that "you will hardly find anyone of the people of Egypt who have the virtue of knowledge and intelligence."[16] According to Strabo, "the entire tribe that is now called Gallic or Galatian

[14] Gordon B. Moskowitz, *Social Cognition: Understanding Self and Others* (New York: Guilford Press, 2005), 3.

[15] See Chapter 2 for further discussion of this definition.

[16] *Leiden Polemon* 31. Translation: Robert Hoyland, "A New Edition and Translation of the Leiden Polemon," in *Seeing the Face, Seeing the Soul: Polemon's Physiognomy from Classical Antiquity to Medieval Islam*, ed. Simon Swain (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 423.

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is intense about war, and high-spirited and quick to fight."[17] Josephus maintained that the Scythians "take pleasure in murdering people and are little better than wild animals,"[18] that the Germani "have tempers that are more violent than those of the wildest beasts,"[19] and that the Parthians were barbarians who were untrustworthy by nature.[20] Cicero, meanwhile, reported that "Athens has a rarefied climate, which is thought also to cause sharpness of wit above the average in the population" while "at Thebes the climate is dense, and so the Thebans are thick and sturdy."[21] Such examples could easily be multiplied. Benjamin Isaac has argued that in antiquity "there existed no intellectual, moral, or emotional objections against such generalizations."[22] The fact that some ancient authors did offer nuanced and evenhanded ethnographical accounts suggests at least a partial recognition of the problems inherent in generalizations of ethnic groups' collective traits,[23] but serious, sustained objections do indeed appear to have been very rare.[24]

[17] *Geogr.* 4.4.2 (C195). Translations of Strabo's *Geography* are taken from Duane W. Roller, *The Geography of Strabo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), here and elsewhere slightly adapted with reference to the Geek text in Stefan L. Radt, *Strabons Geographika* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002–11).

[18] *C. Apion.* 2.269. Translation: John M. G. Barclay, *Against Apion*, Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary 10 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2013), 312.

[19] *BJ* 2.377. Translation: Steve Mason, *Judean War 2*, Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary 1b (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 293.

[20] *BJ* 1.255. Greek: φύσει γὰρ ἀπίστους εἶναι τοὺς βαρβάρους.

[21] *Fat.* 4.7. Here and elsewhere, unless otherwise indicated, I have taken the generally fairly literal LCL renderings of Greek and Latin texts as my point of departure, adapting the translation whenever necessary to clarify the sense in relation to my argument. Translations of biblical texts follow the NRSVue.

[22] Benjamin H. Isaac, "Ethnic Prejudice and Racism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Hellenic Studies*, ed. G. R. Boys-Stones, Barbara Graziosi, and Phiroze Vasunia (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 330. Christopher Tuplin, "Greek Racism? Observations on the Character and Limits of Greek Ethnic Prejudice," in *Ancient Greeks West and East*, ed. Gocha R. Tsetskhladze, Mnemosyne Supplements 196 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 73, similarly notes the "the absence of any demonstrable intellectually serious challenge to [ethnic] prejudices."

[23] Cf. Erich S. Gruen, *Rethinking the Other in Antiquity*, Martin Classical Lectures (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), the first part of which argues that some ancient authors' "descriptions and conceptualizations, far from exhibiting simplistic stereotypes, display subtle characterizations that resist reductive placement into negative (or, for that matter, positive) categories" (4). Gruen also recognizes, however, that "abusive comments can be found without difficulty .... The list of ethnic aspersions is long" (2–3).

[24] Antiphon, *On Truth* D38 (= P.Oxy. 1364, Frag. 2 + P.Oxy. 3647) and Apuleius, *Apol.* 24 are (partial) exceptions to the rule. Ancient notions of cosmopolitanism may also to some extent imply a relatively more critical attitude toward ethnic stereotypes. See Eric

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Taken together, these two observations suggest the strong likelihood that early Christ-followers like Paul, as they roamed the Roman world and encountered people with a variety of ethnic backgrounds, were influenced on some level by ethnic stereotypes. In this study, I examine if and how such stereotypes left their traces on the pages of the corpus Paulinum. I will argue that stereotypes play an important role in a number of these texts and that stereotyping in early Christian texts like Paul's letters is accordingly an issue deserving of closer analysis. Although the question of the impact of ethnic stereotypes on early Christian writings is rarely if ever raised in current scholarship, I argue that it sheds significant new light on the background and content of these texts.

I will use "stereotype analysis" as a shorthand to refer to the process of (1) mapping culturally shared beliefs, knowledge, and expectations about a social group (i.e., stereotypes) and (2) analyzing the degree to which they are reiterated or reflected in a Pauline text. Such stereotype analysis can in principle be applied to the entire Pauline corpus, since almost all of the documents it comprises are (at least ostensibly) addressed to a specific, local audience. In this study, I will focus on groups that can be generally categorized as "ethnic," motivated by an interest in exploring broader questions concerning the significance of ethnicity in early Christianity, including the extent to which early Christian texts advocate ethnic equality and the effect of these texts on later theories of ethnic difference.[25]

The argument pursued in this book stands in some tension with Paul's reputation as someone who abolished ethnic distinctions and advocated social egalitarianism, which continues to be routinely propagated in scholarly and popular accounts of Paul, in relation to texts like Gal 3:28 ("there is no longer Greek nor Jew") and Col 3:11 ("there is no longer Greek and Jew ... barbarian, Scythian ... but Christ is all and in all").[26] I do not dispute that Paul and other early Christians took an important step by incorporating non-Jews as full members in the Christian communities, but I will argue that it does not follow that ethnic stereotypes had ceased to be influential or valid for Paul or for those writing in his name.

Brown, "Hellenistic Cosmopolitanism," in *A Companion to Ancient Philosophy*, ed. Mary Louise Gill and Pierre Pellegrin (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006), 549–58.

[25] On the definition of "ethnic group," see Chapter 2.

[26] See p. 40 (on Gal 3:28) and pp. 137–38 (on Col 3:11).

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1.1 OUTLINE

The chapter immediately following this introduction ("Ethnic Stereotypes: A Cognitive Approach"; Chapter 2) develops the theoretical framework of this study. It addresses the definition of "ethnic group" and delves into recent studies of stereotyping, demonstrating that empirical work on social cognition generates useful insights for the study of ancient literature in general and for the interpretation of Pauline texts in particular. The chapter forms the theoretical backbone for claims made in the following chapters, which will regularly refer back to this chapter in support of the exegetical arguments they advance.

Chapters 3–7 form the heart of the book and offer case studies of Pauline views of Gentiles, Galatians, Corinthians, Scythians, and Cretans. Chapter 3, "Sinful Gentiles," analyzes references to Gentiles, that is, non-Jews, in a range of Pauline epistles. As previously noted, Paul has often been cast as someone who sought to abolish or transcend ethnic identities. This understanding of Paul is based in large part on his adamantly held view that Gentiles could become adherents of the God of Israel. Their non-Jewish identity did not constitute an obstacle to their inclusion among God's people. This theological commitment did not, however, translate into a rejection of stereotypes about Gentiles. The chapter serves as an entry point for the broader discussion of ethnic stereotyping in the letters of Paul by focusing on a relatively widely acknowledged instance of Pauline stereotyping. The chapter examines Paul's statements about this very broad swath of the human population, argues that it is apt to think of these statements in terms of stereotyping, and establishes that Paul was capable of thinking in generalizing and essentializing ways about ethnic groups.

Did Paul think along similar lines about groups more limited in size? Chapter 4 ("Foolish Galatians") argues that Paul's letter to the Galatians exploits stereotypical assumptions about this group. In Greek and Latin literature roughly contemporaneous with Paul, the Galatians were often depicted as people who were liable to quickly swerve off course and to betray their allies. I argue that this portrayal of the Galatian people intersects to a considerable degree with the depiction of the Galatians by Paul, who admonished them for "quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and . . . turning to a different gospel" (Gal 1:6). At this and various other points in this missive, I argue that Paul utilized stereotypical notions about the Galatians in service of his rhetorical purposes.

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Paul explicitly referred to his addressees in Galatians as "foolish Galatians" (3:1, cf. 3:3), lending us a relatively firm basis for theorizing the impact of stereotypes. We are on less secure ground when such direct statements are absent. Chapter 5 ("Licentious Corinthians") takes the Corinthian correspondence as a test case to explore the influence of stereotypes in the absence of any direct claim about the collective traits of the addressees. The chapter focuses on the reputation of Corinth and its inhabitants for sexual licentiousness. I argue that this reputation was not, as is usually maintained, solely a thing of the past, relating to the population prior to the destruction of Ancient Corinth in 146 BCE. A variety of literary and material evidence suggests that Corinth continued to enjoy this reputation in Paul's day, even if to a more limited extent than during the classical era. The ongoing reputation of Corinth for sexual license is notable in relation to the fact that Paul seems far more concerned about sexual malfeasance (*porneia*) in his letters to the Corinthians than anywhere else in his corpus. I argue that the influence of stereotypical views about Corinth and its inhabitants helps account for this emphasis in Paul's correspondence with Corinth. There may have been comparatively greater sexual license in the city, and there appears to have been instances of *porneia* among the believers, but alongside and in addition to any such realities it is plausible that widespread stereotypical assumptions about Corinthian licentiousness led Paul to note such conduct more readily, interpret ambiguous behavior as evidence of *porneia*, and accord the topic unusual significance in his writings to Corinth.

In the Corinthian correspondence, a trait for which the city and its inhabitants were known is referenced but not directly connected to their collective identity (Paul nowhere writes "licentious Corinthians"). In the letter to the Colossians, which is discussed in Chapter 6 ("Barbaric Scythians"), the opposite pertains: The identifier is given ("Scythian," in Col 3:11), but the author never directly states what he believed the Scythians were like.[27] On the basis of the literary context and widespread stereotypes about the Scythians, we can, however, infer that the passage assumes that the Scythians were a particularly barbaric and immoral people. Recent scholars have offered alternative solutions that avoid the implication that the Pauline author subscribed to the view that the Scythians were morally inferior, but these exegetical alternatives do not

[27] On the inclusion in this study of the letters to the Colossians and to Titus, both of which are of dubious authenticity, see pp. 15–16.

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stand up to scrutiny. That this text utilizes and hence confirms a deeply negative stereotype is noteworthy because the text's claim "there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, enslaved and free" is frequently cited as evidence that ethnic prejudice had no place in early Christian contexts. I propose a fresh reading of this text that argues that its point is not that there are no longer any *social* distinctions between these groups but that there are no *moral* distinctions: The author argues that everyone, including even the Scythian, is capable and hence called upon to adhere to the moral standard that the author outlines in this section of the letter. This reading not only explains why the Scythian is mentioned here but also resolves a classic problem in the interpretation of Colossians, because it can account for why the author affirms that there is no longer a distinction between "enslaved and free" (Col 3:11) but shortly afterwards offers elaborate instructions to enslaved people and enslavers that generally affirm the status quo (Col 3:22–4:1). Rather than concluding that the author is inconsistent or untrue to his convictions, I argue that he is taking a position similar to Stoic authors like Seneca, who argued that enslaved people and barbarians were capable of moral excellence (cf. Col 3:11) but that this moral equality need not have tangible social implications (cf. Col 3:22–4:1).

Chapter 7 ("Lying Cretans") turns to the infamous claim in the letter to Titus that the Cretans are "always liars, vicious brutes, lazy gluttons" (1:12). In this case, we have both an ethnic identifier and a straightforward assessment of what the people referred to were supposedly like. Yet unlike in Galatians or in the passages about Gentiles, the author is not expressing this stereotype directly to the people who belong to those groups but to a third party (Titus). The function of the statement is accordingly different from what we have encountered before. The stereotype serves a polemical role to discredit rival teachers and to argue for a strict form of community management.[28]

[28] Case studies are necessarily selective and there is much potentially relevant material that will not be covered in this study (see discussion in the concluding chapter on pp. 210–13). One significant issue that is not discussed in any detail in the book is stereotypes related to Jewish people, which has already been carefully studied in many prior publications. Moreover, my focus is on depictions of *outgroups* and Paul was and remained a Jew throughout his life. While the authors of Colossians and Titus were quite possibly not Jewish, to the extent that they impersonate Paul they reflect a perspective in which Jewish people cannot straightforwardly be identified as members of an outgroup.

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1.2 RECEPTION

Titus 1:12 is arguably the most incontrovertible instance of ethnic stereotyping in the corpus Paulinum and therefore particularly suited for exploring the impact of Pauline stereotyping on later generations' views of ethnic and racial outsiders, as well as the ways in which shifting cultural and intellectual contexts have influenced the interpretation of these texts. This aspect of the book's contribution also comes to the fore in sections on the history of interpretation at the end of the preceding exegetical chapters (Chapters 3–6) before being developed at greater length in the chapter on Titus 1:12.

These sections on the history of interpretation will explore the use of Pauline texts to legitimize and defend ethnic stereotyping in subsequent centuries. I argue that Paul's letters provided apostolic fiat to later generations for thinking about ethnic groups in essentializing and generalizing ways. They also functioned as lenses through which interpreters viewed such groups in their own day and age: The letters of Paul furnished later readers with apostolically approved categories that could be applied to their contemporary world. The history of reception allows us to explore some of the ways in which the effects of these texts extended beyond the realm of exegesis to influence ethnic relations in the real world.

My interest in these later uses of Paul's letters ties in with recent work in Classics and Medieval studies that has explored premodern instances or antecedents of racism.[29] Scholars working in this vein have noted considerable points of overlap between premodern and modern ways of construing human difference and have identified throughlines between

[29] Christian Delacampagne, *L'invention du racisme: antiquité et Moyen Age* (Paris: Fayard, 1983); Benjamin H. Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Miriam Eliav-Feldon, Benjamin H. Isaac, and Joseph Ziegler, eds., *The Origins of Racism in the West* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Denise Eileen McCoskey, *Race: Antiquity and Its Legacy* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018); M. Lindsay Kaplan, *Figuring Racism in Medieval Christianity* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2019); Cord J. Whitaker, *Black Metaphors: How Modern Racism Emerged from Medieval Race-Thinking* (University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019); Denise Eileen McCoskey, ed., *A Cultural History of Race in Antiquity*, Cultural History of Race (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021); Sarah F. Derbew, *Untangling Blackness in Greek Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022). Sasha-Mae Eccleston and Patrice Rankine, eds. "Race and Racism: Beyond the Spectacular." Special issue, *TAPA* 154, no. 1 (Spring 2024).

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ancient and contemporary racist discourses. Early Christian texts have, however, received little attention in this connection.[30] A key aim of the present study is to contribute to addressing this lacuna by studying depictions of ethnic outgroups in one important set of early Christian documents, while also paying attention to the influence that these texts exerted on attitudes toward ethnic and racial outsiders in later eras. It will become apparent that some essential aspects of modern racist thought were defended and legitimized by appeals to sections of the Pauline corpus. While these uses of Paul's writings to legitimate thinking about contemporaries as ethnically inferior are significant for the historical development of racist thought, they are of exegetical interest as well because they highlight what is at stake in the interpretation of Paul. They alert us to the ethical challenges these texts present, which, I suggest, should to be taken into account in our interpretive and hermeneutical work in a much more robust manner than is currently the norm in New Testament scholarship.

Attention to the history of interpretation is valuable also to situate and elucidate contemporary scholarship, including my own. Interpretation never commences with a tabula rasa; texts always come to us already interpreted, "not as a mere object but as a tissue of interpretations."[31] This insight is at the heart of Hans-Georg Gadamer's notion of *Wirkungsgeschichte*.[32] Biblical scholars sometimes use this term to mean something similar to "history of interpretation," except that the net is cast wider to include literature and the visual arts. Yet for Gadamer, *Wirkungsgeschichte* refers to how reading works: It is not an additional method or novel way of approaching texts but a claim about how meaning is constituted.[33] Informed by this perspective, history and

[30] With the obvious exception of anti-Semitism and, to a lesser extent, anti-Black attitudes in early Christian literature, scholars have not paid much attention to early Christian thinking about ethnic outgroups. For further discussion, see my "Origen of Alexandria and the History of Racism as a Theological Problem," *JTS* 71 (2020): 164–95.

[31] Sanjay Seth, *Subject Lessons: The Western Education of Colonial India*, Politics, History, and Culture (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 99.

[32] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*, 5th ed. (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1986), 305–12.

[33] Gadamer states quite clearly: "Es wird also nicht gefordert daß man die Wirkungsgeschichte als eine neue selbständige Hilfsdisziplin der Geisteswissenschaften entwickeln solle, sondern daß man sich selber richtiger verstehen lerne und anerkenne, daß in allem Verstehen, ob man sich dessen ausdrücklich bewußt ist oder nicht, die Wirkung dieser Wirkungsgeschichte am Werke ist" (*Wahrheit und Methode,* 306). See also Robert Evans, *Reception History, Tradition and Biblical Interpretation: Gadamer and Jauss in Current Practice*, Scriptural Traces: Critical Perspectives on the Reception

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reception (per the subtitle of this book) relate to each other in two different yet interconnected ways. I am interested in the history of how the Pauline texts were interpreted and applied in later eras (what is referred to here as reception history) but also in the way in which history, in the sense of our contemporary reconstruction of the past, is influenced by these previous moments of reception. The latter requires the former, since one needs to have a sense of previous interpretations in order to understand how they shape current readings.[34]

Comprehensive treatment of those earlier interpretations is impossible, and I have decided to prioritize interpretations and applications of Paul's letters in anglophone literature from the Victorian era (1837–1901).[35] At various points, I will include other material, ranging from late antiquity to the modern period, to give readers a sense of the longevity of key ideas and interpretations, and to demonstrate that nineteenth-century authors were not unique or idiosyncratic in using Pauline literature to legitimate ethnic stereotyping. The reasoning behind my focus on the late nineteenth century is twofold. First, the Victorian era is particularly interesting for our purposes because it was marked by an "astonishingly deep, relentless, and resonant engagement with the Bible,"[36] while it

and Influence of the Bible 4 (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), xviii, 8, 16; Régis Burnet, *Exegesis and History of Reception*, WUNT 455 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021), 59–73; Mark Knight, "Wirkungsgeschichte, Reception History, Reception Theory," *JSNT* 33 (2010): 137–46.

[34] Accordingly, despite the division between "history" and "reception" in the subtitle of this book (reflected also in the structure of individual chapters), I do not understand historical reconstruction and history of interpretation as unrelated approaches to the text. For a trenchant critique of the tendency of NT scholarship to regard exegesis and reception history as discrete domains, see Knight, "Wirkungsgeschichte," 137–46, esp. 142; and more recently, Régis Burnet, "Why 'Reception History' Is Not Just Another Exegetical Method: The Case of Mark's Ending," *NTS* 69 (2023): 277–78.

[35] For useful reflections on the limitlessness of reception history, see Susan Gillingham, "Biblical Studies on Holiday? A Personal View of Reception History," in *Reception History and Biblical Studies: Theory and Practice*, ed. Emma England and William John Lyons, Scriptural Traces: Critical Perspectives on the Reception and Influence of the Bible 6 (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 26, who notes that many other disciplines and methods face this issue as well and are likewise forced to make subjective selections: "The problem is not exceptional: it is just that reception history, because of its breadth and scope, sometimes highlights this limitation particularly clearly."

[36] Timothy Larsen, *A People of One Book: The Bible and the Victorians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Larsen's book offers a wide-ranging survey of Victorian-era biblical interpretation. See also Ralph Broadbent, "The Bible and the British Empire," in *The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Biblical Criticism*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 329–52; Cole William Hartin, *Anglican Biblical Interpretation in the Nineteenth Century: A Critical Evaluation*

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was also the heyday of so-called scientific racism, which was openly promoted and widely accepted.[37] It is difficult to imagine an era better suited for exploring the complex interplay between biblical interpretation and racism.[38] The second reason to focus on this period is that scholarship in general and perhaps biblical scholarship in particular can be conceived of as a generational enterprise in which scholars respond to the work of their immediate academic forebears. They constitute the chorus of established voices over against which we position our own readings, a dynamic that evinces in a very concrete way the Gadamerian insight that contemporary reconstructions of the past are shaped by

(Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2024); Scott McLaren, ed., *The Bible in the Age of Empire: A Cultural History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2024).

[37] Especially during the second half of the period (i.e., from about 1870 onwards), see, e.g., Christine Bolt, "Race and the Victorians," in *British Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. C. C. Eldridge (London: Macmillan, 1984), 126–47. Even at this time, however, Victorian thought about race was never monolithic. See Douglas Lorimer, *Science, Race Relations and Resistance: Britain, 1870–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013). The prominence of racism during this era was obviously not restricted to the British context. As Jürgen Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt: Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Historische Bibliothek der Gerda Henkel Stiftung (München: C. H. Beck, 2020), 1221, notes: "Für die Zeit seit den 1850er Jahren kann man von einem *dominanten* Rassismus sprechen. Er war über die westliche Welt einschließlich ihre Kolonien sehr ungleichmäßig verteilt, fehlte aber nirgends und war eines der einflussreichsten Weltbildmuster der Epoche …. Extreme rassistische Äußerungen, wie sie um 1820 undenkbar gewesen waren und um 1960 Skandale verursacht hätten, konnten ungestraft öffentlich getan werden" (emphasis original).

[38] By focusing on the use of biblical literature in the context of (the British) Empire, this study follows in the footsteps of important scholarship in postcolonial studies such as R. S. Sugirtharajah, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Biblical Criticism* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); Tat-siong Benny Liew and Fernando F. Segovia, eds., *Colonialism and the Bible: Contemporary Reflections from the Global South*, Postcolonial and Decolonial Studies in Religion and Theology (Lanham: Lexington, 2018); Christopher Stanley, ed., *The Colonized Apostle: Paul through Postcolonial Eyes*, Paul in Critical Contexts (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011). On the related, important question of the multifaceted interplay between race and biblical scholarship, see Clarice J. Martin, "A Chamberlain's Journey and the Challenge of Interpretation for Liberation," *Semeia* 47 (1989): 105–35; Shawn Kelley, *Racializing Jesus: Race, Ideology and the Formation of Modern Biblical Scholarship*, Biblical Limits (London; New York: Routledge, 2002); Laura S. Nasrallah and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, eds., *Prejudice and Christian Beginnings: Investigating Race, Gender, and Ethnicity in Early Christian Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009); David G. Horrell, *Ethnicity and Inclusion: Religion, Race, and Whiteness in Constructions of Jewish and Christian Identities* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020); Love L. Sechrest, *Race & Rhyme: Rereading the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2022); Tat-siong Benny Liew and Shelly Matthews, eds., *Race and Biblical Studies: Antiracism Pedagogy for the Classroom* (Atlanta: SBL, 2022).

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previous moments of reception. Much of the more recent scholarship with which I engage in the main body of each chapter has been formulated in direct or indirect conversation with scholarship from this earlier period. Taking nineteenth-century literature into account therefore allows us to trace shifts over three "generations" of scholarship and to see more clearly how New Testament interpretation reflects the interests, values, and sensibilities of the broader culture. To oversimplify matters for a moment: In the nineteenth century, when racist thought was at its height in terms of intellectual and social respectability, New Testament scholars picked up on Pauline ethnic stereotyping and used it to legitimate and facilitate their own versions of it. Many later scholars, especially post-Shoah, have rejected these readings and have sought to exempt Paul from such rhetoric. The interpretations presented in this book, in turn, position themselves over against what I consider to be overly rosy and ultimately anachronistic readings of Paul.[39] My intention in discussing nineteenth-century interpretation is therefore not to scold earlier scholars for their racist ideas from the supposed moral high ground of the twenty-first century but rather to render intelligible how New Testament interpretation has developed, and why certain nineteenth-century interpretive insights became obscured despite – I will argue – their exegetical merit.

I already noted that the three "generations" model just laid out oversimplifies matters. This is true not only because it casts scholarship from a certain period as a monolithic unit, but also because it suggests that there is only interaction with the immediately preceding generation of scholarship. Nineteenth-century scholarship is, however, not solely a thing of the past; a good number of the commentaries and studies from this era that I will discuss are still regularly read and quoted in recent scholarship. Since their copyright has expired and they are written in English, they are easily accessible resources for students and clergy all over the world. It is therefore valuable to study nineteenth-century scholarship, as its ongoing

[39] It is evident that just as previous generations' interpretations are products of their time (easily perceptible with the benefit of time), my own project is as well; in engaging ethically challenging aspects of a prominent historical source like the Pauline letters, my work likewise reflects a particular historical and cultural moment. Rather than a characteristic specific to my approach, this embeddedness in the present is an inescapable aspect of any attempt at historical reconstruction and ought to be acknowledged rather than ignored. Cf. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 310: "Ein wahrhaft historisches Bewußtsein sieht die eigene Gegenwart immer mit, und zwar so, daß es sich selbst wie das geschichtliche Andere in den richtigen Verhältnisse sieht."

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impact raises important questions about the scholarly legacy within which present-day readers, inside and outside of Christian communities, continue to operate.

Even with regard to the Victorian Age, it remains impossible to discuss more than a sliver of the available evidence. I will make no attempt to provide a comprehensive overview of Pauline interpretation during this period. My interest is that of a New Testament scholar seeking to illustrate some of the uses that can and have been made of Paul's texts so as to situate and inform our own interpretive practices. These sections are accordingly relatively short, bordering on the anecdotal, and highlight some of the more problematic readings of Pauline texts. I have, however, sought to avoid interpretations that seemed fringe, prioritizing instead readings that are found in multiple sources and were advanced by prominent academic and ecclesiastical figures.[40]

Attention to the reception and influence of Paul's writings is one of the reasons why this study is not limited to the seven undisputed letters of Paul. The seven-letter Paul is a relatively recent scholarly invention. The Paul of the history of interpretation wrote considerably more than these seven letters, and if we are interested in the historical impact of Paul's letters, we cannot exclude about half of the corpus Paulinum from the outset, even if in the estimation of much modern scholarship those letters are themselves part of the reception of Paul's epistles. Another reason to include a number of disputed Paulines is the reality that the inauthenticity of these letters is not as well established as the common reference to Paul's "seven authentic letters" might suggest. The authenticity of some letters outside of this limited corpus – including the two letters discussed in some detail in this study, Colossians[41] and

[40] As a practical measure, I have given priority to authors who merited an entry in reference works such as the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, which contains biographies of "significant, influential or notorious figures who shaped British history."

[41] Robert McL. Wilson, *Colossians and Philemon*, ICC (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 8, notes that "The authenticity of Colossians has in fact been strongly maintained by quite a number of scholars." See also the survey of scholarly opinion in Paul Foster, *Colossians*, BNTC (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 73–78. As Andrea Taschl-Erber observes, the authenticity of Colossians is much less commonly defended in Germanophone than in Anglophone scholarship (Andrea Taschl-Erber, "Zwischen Römer- und Epheserbrief: Zur Kontextualisierung des Kolosserbriefs," in *Die Datierung neutestamentlicher Pseudepigraphen: Herausforderungen und neuere Lösungsansätze*, ed. Wolfgang Grünstäudl and Karl Matthias Schmidt, WUNT 470 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021], 133–34).

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Titus[42] – has found several recent scholarly defenders. On a more fundamental level, I am unconvinced of the merits of the rigorous dichotomy routinely posited between letters of the historical Paul and texts produced by others in his name. The seven so-called authentically Pauline letters were frequently coproduced, whether by named co-senders or anonymous secretaries or both, even as Paul's personal voice often dominates in the form of first-person singular verbs.[43] Moreover, later Christ-followers were responsible for the letters as they have been transmitted to us. The texts as we have them are the result of their selecting, collecting, copying, and sometimes combining Paul's missives, a process that took place over many years following Paul's death. Even the Paul of the undisputed letters, then, is not a singular voice from the mid-first century but in some important ways reflective of an ensemble of voices that spans several decades.[44] I have accordingly opted to include a number of disputed letters in this study, not to suggest that all Pauline letters are equally close to or removed from the historical Paul (distinctions can still be made, even if on a sliding scale) but in order to facilitate our thinking about what is at stake in including or excluding them from our construal of Paul and to examine how the ethnic stereotyping that is found in these texts shaped the legacy of the apostle.

[42] See, e.g., Jens Herzer, "Narration, Genre, and Pseudonymity: Reconsidering the Individuality and the Literary Relationship of the Pastoral Epistles," *Journal for the Study of Paul and His Letters* 9 (2019): 30–51; Luke Timothy Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 35A (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 55–97 (discussion pertaining to all three Pastoral Epistles); Stanley E. Porter, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2023); Scot McKnight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023); David W. Pao, *1–2 Timothy, Titus*, Brill Exegetical Commentary (Leiden: Brill, 2024).

[43] Secretaries may well have been routinely involved in the production of Pauline missives yet remain nameless with the exception of Tertius (Rom 16:22). On their possible influence on the content of Pauline and other early Christian writings, see Candida R. Moss, "The Secretary: Enslaved Workers, Stenography, and the Production of Early Christian Literature," *JTS* 74 (2023): 20–56.

[44] On the complexities involved in reconstructing the "real" Paul, see Margaret M. Mitchell, "The Life, Letters, and Thought of Paul," in *The Cambridge Companion to the New Testament*, ed. Patrick Gray (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 73–92.

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