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Travel Among Early Christians

A Socio-Theological Analysis of Pauline and Ignatian Communities

A PhD Dissertation Presented to
Durham University
The Department of Theology and Religion

By
Jason Gerald Borges
2023

Abstract

Travel among early Christians was a symbolic action performed within a matrix of social conventions and theological beliefs. This thesis analyzes particular travel events in Pauline and Ignatian communities to discern how travel expressed early Christian social identity and theological convictions. Methodological insights from mobility studies, transport economics, and social identity, as well as from ancient social institutions that facilitated travel, enable us to interpret the meanings of early Christians' physical movement.

Among Paul's letters, Galatians and Philemon provide particularly rich data on the function and meaning of early Christian travel. Paul's travel into Galatia progressed through social connections, and the Galatians' hospitable response to Paul demonstrated their participation in Christ. Within the Christian community, Philemon functioned as a host who refreshed itinerant believers through his hospitality and so was asked to host future traveling ministers. Onesimus' journey to find an *amicus domini* indicates the significance of Christian social connectivity across space. When Onesimus returned, Paul commended him as a gospel minister for Philemon to host and support, an act that would re-constitute their social identities.

Ignatius' travel across Asia Minor, as evidenced in his seven letters, instigate a flurry of wide-ranging travel among the churches in Asia. They visited the convict to provide encouragement and material support—a reflection of early Christian theological convictions regarding suffering. Ignatius then requested that distant churches send embassies to his church in Syria to promote intercivic harmony between the distant churches.

In each of these cases, travel embodied and formed a rich set of social connections and theological beliefs. The praxis of travel reflected and constructed the communal identity, beliefs, and values of early Christians. Movement among communities, a sacred action with theological meaning, expressed Christians transregional identity and an alternative honor code.

Preface

This research project began in March 2020, just as COVID–19 became a global pandemic. My life felt all too ironic—I was researching ancient travel during a period of severe travel restrictions. The process of researching, writing, and finalizing this thesis has at times felt like a long, winding journey. Thanks to several people, I have managed to reach the end, and not without some joyful discoveries along the way.

Prof. John M. G. Barclay proved to be the ideal doctoral supervisor in every possible way. He was always available and interested in discussing my material. His feedback and genuine encouragement made the process truly enjoyable and rewarding. Dr. Mark Wilson, my colleague at the Asia Minor Research Center, has been gracious and helpful in many ways. He fielded my many questions about the ancient world and encouraged me to reach beyond the world of New Testament scholarship for fresh insights. My wife, Angie, along with our girls, have been exceedingly supportive all along, providing me constant space and encouragement. Thanks for listening to me around the table, whether about some peculiar aspect of ancient travel or my research struggles. Thanks to my family, I'm finally done with my PDF and can treat people as a doctor!

Thank you also to my secondary supervisors at Durham University, Drs. Jane Heath and Kim Fowler. They cheerfully provided help and feedback at crucial points. On a logistical level, limited travel made accessing resources challenging but not impossible thanks to four research centers in Turkey: the British Institute at Ankara (BIAA), the American Research Institute in Turkey (ARIT), the Mediterranean Civilizations Research Center (AKMED), and the Asia Minor Research Center (AMRC). Whenever I could not access a resource here in Turkey, the Durham University Library promptly located and sent it to me. Thank you to the staff at those institutional libraries who assisted me on many occasions.

Unless otherwise noted, the translations of biblical texts follow the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). Translations for the Apostolic Fathers are from Michael W. Holmes, T*he Apostolic Fathers* (3rd ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007). References to extra-biblical Greek and Latin texts are from the Loeb Classical Library. Unless marked BCE, all dates refer to the Common/Christian Era (CE).

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Introduction

The Roman Empire inaugurated an era of unprecedented travel around the Mediterranean. The imperial road network, as Edward Gibbon said, "united the subjects of the most distant provinces by an easy and familiar intercourse."[1] Utilizing Rome's transportation infrastructure, people could travel, by sea or by land, from Arabia to Spain without leaving the shadow of imperial Rome. Although travelers did face certain risks and costs, they traveled rapidly and with relative ease. The new era of expanded mobility was widely appreciated by pagans,[2] Jews,[3] and Christians[4] alike.

Early Christians availed themselves of the new possibilities for travel and communication across the Roman Empire, especially its eastern provinces. The apostle Paul, the most famous early Christian traveler, traversed an estimated 25,000 kilometers during his ministry journeys.[5] Moreover, numerous ministry associates, such as Phoebe, Priscilla, Timothy, Titus, and church representatives, accompanied Paul and traveled on special missions to Christian communities. Travel was a marked feature of the Pauline mission, not to mention people associated with Peter, John, and even anonymous super-apostles who itinerated around the Mediterranean in the first century. The early second-century letters of Ignatius of Antioch provide an intriguing window into Christian travel. The bishop's journey across Asia ignited a flurry of travel among the churches that covered an estimated 22,000 kilometers in just a few months. From the brief glimpses we get into early Christian communities, we observe that they were particularly mobile. As Robert Grant summarized, "Christians traveled, perhaps more than most of their contemporaries."[6]

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[1] Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. 1 (London: Methuen & Co., 1897), 50.
[2] Plutarch, *CG* 7.1; Pliny, *Pan*. 29; *Ep*. 8.4.2; Statius, *Silvae* 4.20–60; Aristides, *In Rom*. (26.)100–102; Strabo, *Geogr*. 4.6.6; 5.3.8.
[3] Philo, *Legat.* 47; Josephus, *J.W.* 3.115, 188, 141–42.
[4] Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.30.3; Tertullian, *An.* 30.3; cf. Procopius, *De Bello Gothico* 5.14.6–11.
[5] Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary: Realities, Strategies and Methods* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 122; about 15,000 kilometers was on foot by land. Ronald Hock, *The Social Context of Paul's Ministry* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1980), 27 calculated that Paul traveled 10,000 miles.
[6] Robert M. Grant, "The Social Setting of Second-Century Christianity," in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition, Vol. 1: The Shaping of Christianity in the Second and Third Centuries*, ed. E. P. Sanders (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 21–22.

§0.1 The Approach: A Socio-Theological Analysis

Historians have long observed the extent of travel in the early Christian movement, particularly as it relates to the new religion's geographical expansion. "The unstoppable expansion of the Christian faith in the Mediterranean region," Martin Hengel noted, "is the red thread for every history of early Christianity."[7] The means and methods of ancient travel have been documented by scholars of Greco-Roman,[8] Jewish,[9] and early Christian history.[10] However, the social meanings and theological import of early Christian travel have received

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[7] Martin Hengel, "Die Ursprünge der Christlichen Mission1," *NTS* 18, no. 1 (1971): 15.

[8] Caroline A. J. Skeel, *Travel in the First Century After Christ* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1901); Jean-Marie André and Marie-Françoise Baslez, *Voyager Dans l'Antiquité* (Paris: Fayard, 1993); Lionel Casson, *Travel in the Ancient World* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994); Ray Laurence, *The Roads of Roman Italy: Mobility and Cultural Change* (London: Routledge, 1999); Colin Adams and Ray Laurence, eds., *Travel and Geography in the Roman Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2001); Linda Ellis and Frank L. Kidner, eds., *Travel, Communication and Geography in Late Antiquity: Sacred and Profane* (Hants, England: Routledge, 2004); Jim Roy and Colin Adams, eds., *Travel, Geography and Culture in Ancient Greece, Egypt and the Near East* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2007); Cornelis van Tilburg, *Traffic and Congestion in the Roman Empire* (London: Routledge, 2007); Luuk Ligt and Laurens Ernst Tacoma, eds., *Migration and Mobility in the Early Roman Empire* (Leiden: Brill, 2016); Thomas Biggs and Jessica Blum, eds., *The Epic Journey in Greek and Roman Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019). For chapter-length overviews, see James Romm, "Travel," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Greek and Roman Novel*, ed. Tim Whitmarsh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 109–26; Maria Pretzler, "Travel and Travel Writing," in *The Oxford Handbook of Hellenic Studies*, ed. George Boys-Stones, Barbara Graziose, and Phiroze Vasunia (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 352–63; Anne Kolb, "Communications and Mobility in the Roman Empire," in *Oxford Handbook of Roman Epigraphy*, ed. C. Bruun and J. Edmondson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 649–70; Robert L. Cioffi, "Travel in the Roman World," in *Oxford Handbooks Online* (Oxford University Press, 2016); Catherine Hezser, "Recent Research on Travel, Network Theory, and Identity in Jewish, Christian, and Graeco-Roman Society (300 BCE - 600 CE)," *Jerusalem and Eretz Israel. A Journal for Land of Israel Studies and Archaeology* 12–13 (2020): 13–28.

[9] Samuel Krauss, "Handel und Verkehr," in *Talmudische Archäologie*, vol. 2 (Leipzig: G. Fock, 1910), 316–49; Catherine Hezser, "Travel and Mobility," in *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Daily Life in Roman Palestine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 210–26; Catherine Hezser, *Jewish Travel in Antiquity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011); Elisa Uusimäki, "Itinerant Sages: The Evidence of Sirach in Its Ancient Mediterranean Context," *JSOT* 44, no. 3 (2020): 315–36.

[10] W. M. Ramsay, "Roads and Travel (in NT)," in *Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 5 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1904), 375–402; Barry J. Beitzel and F. F. Bruce, "Travel and Communication," in *ABD*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992); Blake Leyerle, "Communication and Travel," in *The Early Christian World*, ed. Philip F. Esler (London: Routledge, 2004), 452–74; Philip A. Harland, ed., *Travel and Religion in Antiquity* (Waterloo, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2011); Maren R. Niehoff, *Journeys in the Roman East: Imagined and Real* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017); Stanley E. Porter, "Travel in the Roman World," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Scot McKnight, Lynn H. Cohick, and Nijay K. Gupta, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2023), 1075–81.

less attention.[11] Reconstructions of early Christianity often overlook the social and theological aspects of Christians' travel. Since Irenaeus of Lyon and Eusebius of Caesarea, early Christianity has been viewed primarily as the development of and struggle for theological orthodoxy. This decontextualized and abstracted "great ideas and great men" approach to history has overlooked travel and concomitant hospitality, for such pedestrian behaviors are not regarded as socially meaningful or as expressions of theological convictions.

However, beliefs and theology are more than ideas in people's heads or words on a page. People perform their ideas kinetically. Our lives perform a "logic of practice" in which our bodies express our mental processes.[12] Life is the constant interplay between ideas and actions, thoughts and behavior. Therefore, physical movements are cultural practices with meaning derived from their social context. Travel is never just travel. It is a social event during which particular conceptual frameworks became enacted, articulated, and accepted. Physical movement across space reflects and creates systems of belief. Therefore, early Christian travel can be approached as a rich and viable source for understanding the social and theological aspects of early Christians.

Like all forms of movement, ancient travel was a cultural phenomenon with meaning that its participants projected, apprehended, and contested. By approaching travel events as "cultural moments" embedded in specific contexts, we can attend to the values and narratives of early Christian travelers.[13] Our interpretative task, in the words of anthropologist Clifford Geertz, is a matter of "saying what it is others are saying" through their expressions.[14] The purpose of our investigation into travel is to gain "access to the conceptual world in which our subjects live" by unpacking particular cultural experiences for the layers of meanings,

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[11] Abraham J. Malherbe, *Social Aspects of Early Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1983), 62 suggested that travel was a major factor in determining the "social character of early Christianity" but left the topic unexplored.

[12] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990).

[13] For a similar anthropological approach to contemporary Christian travel, see Brian M. Howell, *Short-Term Mission: An Ethnography of Christian Travel Narrative and Experience* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012).

[14] Clifford Geertz, "Making Experiences, Authoring Selves," in *The Anthropology of Experience*, ed. Victor W. Turner and Edward M. Bruner (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 374.

implications, and interactions as understood from the inside.[15] The intended result is an emic description of early Christian travel events yielding insights into three areas: the historical praxis, the social identity, and the theological convictions of early Christian communities.

The social and theological implications of travel rest upon actual historical movements. The microscopic analysis of physical movement—who traveled where when—is a prerequisite for assessing the meanings of early Christian travel. For this reason, I have attempted, as far as the evidence allows, to reconstruct the geographical and chronological contexts of the travel events investigated. This occurs in three different sections: §3.1 for Paul's travel into Galatia, §4.2 for the geography of travel in the epistle of Philemon, and Chapter 6 for travel in Ignatius' letters. Historical details are rarely explicit, so they must be inferred by triangulating clues from the text, social models, and geographic information. This close historical analysis of the travel events yields historical and exegetical conclusions, and it provides the foundation the aim of this thesis—an analysis of the social meaning and theology of certain early Christian travel events.

The social aspect involves the following questions: What factors propelled their movement across space? Who did they travel as? How did the praxis of early Christian travel (and hospitality) reflect and construct communal identity, beliefs, and values? Answering these questions requires a close look at both the language discussing travel and the contextualization of that travel alongside relevant social institutions that structured ancient travel. The meaning of early Christian travel often derives from how the Christians utilized and reconfigured social institutions and customs. All travel occurs within particular social parameters, and so assumes social meaning(s) and creates social facts. Early Christian travel reflects and fashions a new pattern of relational ties between fellow believers in Christ.

We also examine the theological aspects of early Christian travel. What does the travel event reveal about early Christians' theological convictions? How did their mobility embody and articulate their theology? Travel reflects one's conception of the world and functions as performed theology, especially for ancient travelers who believed travel took place in the sacred realm. As a result, this work explores how travel encodes specifically Christian

[15] Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 24.

patterns of worth, honor, and community as shaped by their conception of God in Christ. (My theological analysis is descriptive, not normative. Therefore, I do not incorporate theological categories from later Christian tradition, but seek only to describe the God-related conceptual frameworks used by early Christians themselves.)

These three aspects of early Christian travel—historical, social, and theological—naturally overlap and intersect. They would have been indistinguishable to the people who traveled. I do not impose them upon each travel event as rigid categories but instead utilize them as etic designations for analysis and synthesis in Chs. 3–8.

§0.2 The Subject: Travel Among Early Christians

As per the title, this thesis analyzes *travel among early Christians*. Let me define each term. *Travel* refers to movement across space, going from one socio-physical location to another. Early Christians traveled for many reasons. Like other peoples in the Roman Empire,[16] Christians would have been military personnel assigned to new locations, business people traveling for commercial reasons, refugees fleeing the Roman war in Jerusalem, and exiles banished from Rome under Claudius. In those instances, they were Christians who traveled; their travel was not self-initiated based on their religious identity as Christians. To narrow the scope of this investigation, I focus on voluntary travel that was animated foremost by the person's socio-religious identity as a Christian. These movements were enabled and performed because of a social identity based upon theological convictions shared with co-religionists. Such travel carried a certain function within the community's ideological convictions. I examine instances of travel that were foremost for Christian purposes—i.e., when people moved because of their Christian identity and beliefs.

[16] For the motivations and factors behind ancient travel, which are often distinguished as voluntary and involuntary, see Laurence, *The Roads of Roman Italy*, 146; Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 384–87; Ligt and Tacoma, *Migration and Mobility in the Early Roman Empire*, 9–12; Cioffi, "Travel in the Roman World," 9–10. For the reasons behind Christian travel, see Leyerle, "Communication and Travel," 442–43; Philip A. Harland, "Pausing at the Intersection of Religion and Travel," in *Travel and Religion in Antiquity*, ed. Philip A. Harland (Waterloo, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2011), 1–26.

Rather than discussing Christian travel as a generic topic or analyzing all instances of Christian travel, I focus on specific travel events. The term *travel event* refers to a specific instance of movement across space occurring within a particular social context and historical moment. This case-study approach allows for a more granular analysis. I examine a select number of specific travel events in depth to probe more fully their social and theological meanings. This "thick analysis," heeding Geertz's advice, presents a microscopic analysis of early Christian travel events, which themselves point towards the community's broader social and theological realities.

We focus on specific travel events that occurred *among* Christians, when Christians traveled to fellow Christians. The topic of Christian travel has long focused on "missionary journeys" or "evangelistic expansion" (see §1.1). In that view, travel refers to one-way apostolic movement to pagan peoples for evangelistic purposes. However, most early Christian travel was performed between believers. Their destinations were often existing Christian communities. Intercommunal movement allows us to investigate the social meanings that travel assumed within the community.

Finally, our investigation is limited to the travel of *early Christians*—people who collectively identified with Jesus the Christ and lived within the first century of the new movement. Of the many instances of travel that occurred among early Christians, I have chosen to analyze five travel events that occurred within Pauline and Ignatian communities.[17] These are: Paul's travel into Galatia (Ch. 3), Christian itineration to Philemon (Ch. 4), Onesimus' departure and return (Ch. 5), the travel of churches to Ignatius the convict (Ch. 7), and the travel of churches to Ignatius' former church in Antioch (Ch. 8). The main reason for investigating travel in the communities of Paul and Ignatius is that their letters provide detailed, first-hand information about travel, which can be contextualized and analyzed within its social and historical contexts. Both authors wrote at least seven letters of notable length to specific communities. Their cumulative output offers a rich and incomparable archive for analyzing the history and meaning of travel among early Christians. The nature of the writings, as ad hoc responses to specific situations, makes them useful for social inquiry. Other early

[17] The terms *Pauline communities* and *Ignatian communities* do not suggest that the churches were started by them, controlled by them, or unknown to other Christian leaders. For the sake of identifying and defining certain early Christian travel events, the terms simply refer to groups of Christ-followers who communicated with Paul and Ignatius, without implying any particular measure of authority or exclusivity.

Christian literature, such as apostolic acts (both canonical and apocryphal) and teaching about itinerants (e.g., *Did.* 11–13) offer later reflections about travel in hindsight. The personal letters of Paul and Ignatius, however, provide responses to specific travel events occurring in the moment. They sought to mobilize and interpret contemporaneous travel events for the communities to which they wrote. The letters articulate, usually implicitly, the social and theological dynamics surrounding the travel events.

A secondary, and more personal, reason for focusing on Paul and Ignatius is that their travel took place mostly in the province of Asia, and I resided in Türkiye while writing this thesis. The geographical proximity of the subject matter has allowed me to perform autopsies of various routes, sites, and material artifacts discussed throughout the publication. Such field visits have proved useful for stimulating new questions and insights. Traveling to examine physical evidence granted me not only welcome breaks from the library but also fresh perspectives on the topic of early Christian travel.

To summarize, the subject of this work—"travel among early Christians"—is specific instances of physical movement performed for Christian purposes, between Christian communities, and by Christians associated with Paul and Ignatius.

The socio-theological analysis of early Christian travel develops in three parts. Part I examines the hermeneutics of travel. To discern the social and theological aspects of travel, we must note what travel means and how it takes on meaning. The significance of physical mobility is not self-evident, so travel must somehow be interpreted. Chapter One examines past interpretations of early Christian travel. I analyze five general approaches in historical sequence, then outline my method of discerning the socio-theological meanings of travel. Chapter Two introduces theoretical resources from the social sciences to aid in our interpretation of travel. The two opening chapters provide a framework to contextualize and interpret specific instances of travel among early Christians in subsequent chapters.

Part II looks at specific travel events in two Pauline epistles—Galatians and Philemon. Chapter Three traces Paul's route into and through Galatia in light of social connectivity, then analyzes Paul's recollection of the Galatians' hospitality in Gal 4:12–20. Chapter Four considers the identity of Philemon in light of travel and develops a social profile of this rather enigmatic figure. Chapter Five reassesses the meanings and implications of a much-discussed

travel event in early Christianity—the departure and return of Philemon's slave, Onesimus. These particular travel events in Galatians and Philemon, along with data incorporated from other Pauline epistles, provide a window into the function and meaning of travel within Pauline communities.

Part III investigates the peculiar series of travel events surrounding Ignatius' trip from Syria to Rome. Chapter Six assesses the route and logistics of Ignatius' land journey across Asia, tracing the flurry of secondary travel spawned by his arrest and transport. Chapter Seven looks at the practicalities and meanings of the churches' visits to Ignatius as a prisoner. Chapter Eight contextualizes Ignatius' request for the churches in Asia to send embassies to Antioch in order to congratulate and celebrate with the church. The conclusion draws together the main historical, social, and theological aspects of travel among early Christians.

PART I: Interpreting Travel

Chapter 1: Historical Interpretations of Early Christian Travel

The movement of early Christians across the Roman Empire invites interpretation. What did their travel mean and accomplish? Historians have interpreted early Christian travel in different ways, which I categorize as: mission expansion, imperial triumph, identity formation, group connectivity, and hegemonic power (see Figure 1.1). This five-fold categorization admittedly imposes labels upon various approaches to early Christian travel, which are certainly more complex and fluid than these labels. However, the five etic categories broadly identify the main historical approaches to early Christian travel.[1] This chapter presents and analyzes these five interpretations of early Christian travel in their historical order. For each hermeneutical approach, I examine the methods, assumptions, and claims of the main proponents.[2] This overview surveys the past and raises the need for a new hermeneutical model for understanding travel among early Christians.

Approach	View of Travel	Era	Proponents
traditional	mission expansion	1–19 CC	Acts, Eusebius
political	imperial triumph	late 1800s	Ramsay, Harnack
social	identity formation	1970s–80s	Theissen, Meeks
network	group connectivity	21C	Bauckham, Concannon
postcolonial	hegemonic power	21C	Luckritz Marquis, Nasrallah

Figure 1.1. Interpretative Approaches to Early Christian Travel

[1] For similar attempts to classify scholarship on Christian travel see Ryan S. Schellenberg, "'Danger in the Wilderness, Danger at Sea': Paul and the Perils of Travel," in *Travel and Religion in Antiquity*, ed. Philip A. Harland (Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2011), 142–46; Cavan Concannon, "Economic Aspects of Inter-City Travel among Pauline Assemblies," in *Paul and Economics: A Handbook*, ed. Thomas R. Blanton IV and Raymond Pickett (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 338–44.

[2] Travel also figures large in the study of Pauline chronology; e.g., Robert Jewett, *A Chronology of Paul's Life* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979); Rainer Riesner, *Paul's Early Period: Chronology, Mission Strategy, Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997); Mark Wilson, "The Route of Paul's First Journey to Pisidian Antioch," *NTS* 55, no. 4 (2009): 471–83; Mark Wilson, "The Ephesian Elders Come to Miletus: An Annaliste Reading of Acts 20:15-18a," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 34, no. 1 (2013): 1–9; Douglas A. Campbell, *Framing Paul: An Epistolary Biography* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014). The chronology discussion focuses on the historical and geographical dimensions of travel (when Paul traveled where), not the social and theological meaning of mobility, so is not discussed in this chapter.

§1.1 Traditional: Travel as Mission Expansion

Many histories of Christianity depict travel as a function of an apostolic mission. The apostles' travel served evangelistic purposes. They bravely and boldly went out from Jerusalem to fulfill Jesus' final words, "go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matt 28:18–20). In this interpretive framework, missionary travel expanded the Church and illustrated the apostles' heroic qualities. This was the conventional view of Christian travel into the 1800s, and it remains prevalent.

The traditional interpretation of Christian travel often begins with Paul, the legendary apostle to the Gentiles. Scholarship has depicted Paul as a heroic and strategic missionary.[3] The inspired apostle orchestrated and executed a grand mission strategy across the Roman Empire. Paul's itinerary in Romans 15:19–24 represents, according to James Dunn, "a sweeping vision of missionary strategy" designed "to achieve the greatest missionary expansion."[4] His ambitious, empire-wide strategy fulfilled Isaiah's eschatological vision of a Gentile ingathering (cf. Isa 66:18–19; Rom 15:19–24).[5] Imposing his will across space and time, the missionary Paul executed his travel plans with certainty and confidence.[6] Such missionary endeavors, according to Bruce Winter, "earned him the accolade of the greatest missionary of the early Gentile church, if not in the history of Gentile Christianity."[7] Paul was a determined missionary whose extraordinary ambitions pioneered Christianity's universal mission program, which ultimately succeeded in converting the Roman Empire.[8]

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[3] For the tendency of recent scholarship to praise Paul as a courageous traveler, see Schellenberg, "Perils of Travel," 142–47.

[4] James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, WBC (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 1988), 869.

[5] James M. Scott, *Paul and the Nations: The Old Testament and Jewish Background of Paul's Mission to the Nations with Special Reference to the Destination of Galatians*, vol. 2/84, WUNT (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), 5–56; Riesner, *Paul's Early Period*, 241–55; Robert Jewett, *Romans* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006), 911–15.

[6] W. M. Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches* (New York: A. C. Armstrong & Son, 1904), 17–20, citing Acts 16:1ff, 18:21ff, and Rom 15:24.

[7] Bruce W. Winter, "Dangers and Difficulties for the Pauline Missions," in *The Gospel to the Nations: Perspectives on Paul's Mission*, ed. Peter Bolt and Mark Thompson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 285–95.

[8] Martin Goodman, *Mission and Conversion: Proselytizing in the Religious History of the Roman Empire:* (Claredon: Oxford, 1994), 105–06.

The interpretation of Christian travel as mission expansion dates back to the New Testament. The canonical book of Acts idealizes Paul and the apostles as pioneering missionaries whose travels expanded the Church.[9] While all early Christian texts employ a degree of rhetoric to represent travel, Acts applies an overarching interpretative rubric to Christian travel. Luke depicts travel within the framework of mission expansion. For this reason, I discuss Acts in this section as an instance of secondary literature that presents travel through a particular interpretive scheme, namely, gospel proclamation and geographical expansion. Luke establishes the missional nature of travel with Jesus' final teachings (Luke 24:46–48). The apostles would move out from Jerusalem, being sent as Spirit-empowered "witnesses" to all nations.[10] The programmatic verse of Acts 1:8 structures both the literary text of Acts and the traditional narrative of early Christianity history. The apostles travel as "witnesses" of Jesus, from the center to the ends of the world, proclaiming the gospel. Early leaders such as Philip (8:4–25, 26–39) and Paul travel *in order to* evangelize, and they proclaim the gospel *while* traveling. Travel anticipates and leads to proclamation. Within Luke-Acts, journeys become a sacred space for ongoing witness; God works when his people move.[11] Even travel that starts with alternative purposes results in mission activity. Persecution forces believers from Jerusalem into the countryside of Judea and Samaria; nevertheless, "those who were scattered went from place to place, proclaiming the word" (8:4). Paul set out toward Damascus to harm disciples but is commissioned to the Gentiles while traveling and preaches in the Damascene synagogues (13:15, 20). In the final instance, Paul sails to Rome as a prisoner but the journey affords evangelistic opportunities among "barbaric" islanders in Malta and Jews in the imperial capital (28:1–10, 17–30).[12] The travel motif in Acts links apostolic movement with gospel proclamation and religious conversion. The divinely instructed and empowered apostles travel out from Jerusalem to Gentile unbelievers for the purpose of gospel expansion. Such travel is notably hagiographic (i.e., heroic, sacrificial, and

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[9] Richard I. Pervo, *Profit With Delight: The Literary Genre of the Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 54–57, which claims that Luke imposed schematic models and "created the missionary travels he reports" merely to entertain and please his readers.

[10] Loveday Alexander, "Mapping Early Christianity: Acts and the Shape of Early Church History," *Int* 57 (2003): 163–73 argues that travel in Acts creates a mental map of interlocking structural networks "at a very deep structural level" (p. 171) and so does not follow the Eusebian "center and periphery" model. However, her aim to remap the centralized hierarchy in Jerusalem remains unconvincing.

[11] Troy M. Troftgruben, "Slow Sailing in Acts: Suspense in the Final Sea Journey (Acts 27:1–28:15)," *JBL* 136, no. 4 (2017): 949–68.

[12] Joshua W. Jipp, *Divine Visitations and Hospitality to Strangers in Luke-Acts: An Interpretation of the Malta Episode in Acts 28:1-10* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

divinely guided) and unidirectional (i.e., from Jerusalem to the nations, from believer to pagan).

This heroic and missional view of travel in Acts shaped subsequent interpretations of travel. The early letter of *1 Clement* taught that the apostles received their orders and then went out preaching the good news in the cities and countryside (42:3–4). Latter apocryphal Acts narrate the apostles' constant and remarkable movements from city to city for evangelistic purposes. Eusebius' *Historia Ecclesiastica* also supported the traditional view of early Christian travel. The apostles spread out from Jerusalem and evangelized designated territories, thus establishing the foundations of orthodoxy (*HE* 3.1). The subsequent generation of apostolic successors followed suit—"leaving their homes, they took up the work of evangelists, eager to preach the message of faith to those who had never heard it," and when they laid new foundations, they "then set off again to other lands and peoples" (*HE* 3.37). The earliest histories of the Christian movement narrate how apostolic leaders traveled and evangelized in new places.

Modern Protestantism furthered this conception of Christian travel as evangelism and expansion. With the rise of European missionary societies in the modern era, Paul's trips in Acts became titled "missionary journeys,"[13] a designation that remains in most Bibles and atlases. From this perspective, Paul was sent three times from his home base to evangelize distant locales, then returned home.[14] Paul and the apostles became prototypical missionaries deployed abroad and, thus, a model worthy of emulation. William Carey's influential missionary tractate, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians* (1792), summarizes early Church history as the continual propagation of Christianity in foreign lands.[15] The apostles set an example in being "willing to leave all the comforts of life behind them, . . . labouring, and travelling, night and day."[16] In this framework, travel served evangelistic goals and caused mission expansion.

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[13] John Townsend, "Missionary Journeys in Acts and European Missionary Societies," *AThR* 68, no. 2 (1986): 99–104.
[14] Paul's missionary journeys are typically identified as Acts 13:1–14:28; 15:36–18:22; and 18:23–21:17.
[15] William Carey, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens In Which the Religious State* (Leicester, England: Ann Ireland, 1792).
[16] Carey, *An Enquiry*, 75–76.

Missionary travel is often presented in heroic terms. The adversities of travel are a mere crucible for demonstrating the messenger's resolve and commitment. The German scholar Adolf Deissmann, after two personal journeys through Anatolia, noted his own "inexpressible astonishment at the purely physical achievement of Paul the traveller."[17] The immense challenges and dangers that Paul overcame revealed "his human greatness."[18] In more recent scholarship, Jerome Murphy-O'Connor spiritualizes the dangers Paul faced on the road, making travel a spiritual struggle and embodiment of mission—"Every inn he visited obliged him to consider others as potential thieves . . . Circumstances conspired to push the self to the centre of this consciousness, whereas he wanted to be totally focused on the other."[19] The dangers of travel confirm the character of the divine messenger, a heroic agent of mission expansion in uncharted territories.

This evangelistic and heroic view of early Christian travel, I propose, results from the in-group and biographical nature of most Christian historiography. The Church has long narrated her own birth and development. As a result, church histories tend to recount the mythic origins of the group to provide social identity and guide behavior.[20] The motif of travel as mission expansion allowed Christian historians to both explain the origins of the movement and inspire their contemporary Christians to engage in missionary activity. The social position of Christian historians as "family biographers" has fueled the traditional interpretation of early Christian travel, which remains pervasive. Scholars continue to assume that travel signifies Christian mission[21] and "bringing the gospel"[22] to pagans. Hezser's learned monograph, *Jewish Travel in Antiquity*, characterizes Christian mobility as missionary activity in search of adherents.[23]

Though pervasive, the traditional view is overly determined and limited by the single factor of mission expansion. As a result, it view overlooks the reality that most Christian travel was to and from their co-religionists; Christians traveled among themselves. Their mobility was

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[17] Adolf Deissmann, *Paul: A Study in Social and Religious History* (New York: Harper, 1957), 64–65.
[18] Deissmann, *Paul*, 59.
[19] Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 100.
[20] Marianne Palmer Bonz, *The Past as Legacy* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000).
[21] Donald Wayne Riddle, "Early Christian Hospitality: A Factor in the Gospel Transmission," *JBL* 57, no. 2 (1938): 145.
[22] Winter, "Dangers and Difficulties for the Pauline Missions," 294.
[23] Hezser, *Jewish Travel in Antiquity*, 445.

foremost communal, not evangelistic.[24] For example, Paul's desire to travel to Rome and "preach the gospel" (Rom 1:15) would occur in a city which already had multiple churches (Rom 16). Also, the flurry of movement sparked by Ignatius of Antioch's imprisoned journey across Asia Minor consisted of travel among early Christians. However, in the traditional interpretation, the concept of travel as unidirectional mission expansion overshadows the bulk of early Christian travel that occurred among fellow Christians. Overall, the missionary expansion interpretation is limited and restrictive, removing from view other factors, effects, and meanings of early Christian travel.

The amount of travel for explicitly religious purposes, compared to social or personal reasons, appears to be overestimated.[25] Two recent publications about travel in late-antique Christianity helpfully distinguish between idealized literary representations of religious travel and actual travel events. This distinction exposes the Christian literary tendency to impose a traditional missionary reading upon travel. In Oxyrhynchus, literary sources generally associate Christian travel with religious motivations such as proselytism or pilgrimage. However, papyri and other material evidence suggest a more secular and utilitarian function for travel—e.g., occupational-related work and maintaining social relations.[26] Likewise, literary texts that narrate the expansion of Christianity toward India, such as hagiographies and ecclesiastical histories, represent travel as evangelization. But Christianity most likely proceeded from the ancient Mediterranean into south Asia through the socio-commercial networks of merchants.[27] Such studies of travel among Christians in late antiquity highlight the early and common tendency of Christians to represent their travel simply as mission expansion, regardless of other social factors. The traditional view of Christian travel as a

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[24] Michael Thompson, "The Holy Internet: Communication Between Churches in the First Christian Generation," in *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 60 acknowledges the "constellation of other factors" that propelled interchurch travel, though prioritizes "the fundamental missionary impulse that drove Paul and others to range widely."

[25] Sabine R. Huebner, "'In Those Days Mary Set out …': Travel by the Lower Classes in Roman Times," in *Papyri and the Social World of the New Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 87–114, passim, esp. 114.

[26] Lincoln Blumell, *Lettered Christians: Christians, Letters, and Late Antique Oxyrhynchus* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 54–56; Lincoln Blumell, "Christians on the Move in Late Antique Oxyrhynchus," in *Travel and Religion in Antiquity*, ed. Philip A. Harland (Waterloo, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2011), 235–54.

[27] Nathanael J. Andrade, *The Journey of Christianity to India in Late Antiquity: Networks and the Movement of Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

means of missionary expansion, while accurate to a certain extent, ultimately limits and overly determines the meaning of early Christian travel.

§1.2 Political: Travel as Imperial Triumph

Around the turn of the twentieth century, scholars began to re-interpret early Christian travel in political terms. Two prominent European scholars of the era, William Ramsay and Adolf von Harnack, portrayed the extensive travel of early Christians as a sign of imperial triumph and conquest. They both wrote during the height of European imperialism (1894–1914). At that time, travel, in the forms of commercial enterprise and scientific inquiry, symbolized the triumph of Christian Europe.[28] Such physical movement enacted global imperialism. This colonial framework shaped Ramsay's and Harnack's interpretations of early Christian travel. Through Christians' extensive travel, the early church rivaled and ultimately replaced the Roman Empire.

William Ramsay, Professor of Classics at the University of Aberdeen, pioneered the historical geography of Asia Minor.[29] His frequent research trips to the Ottoman Empire, during most summers between 1880 and 1914, allowed him to localize many ancient sites, trace the travel routes across the region,[30] and develop his influential South Galatia hypothesis.[31] Ramsay's research on the geography and methods of ancient travel led to new theories regarding the significance of early Christian travel.[32]

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[28] W. H. C. Frend, *Archaeology of Early Christianity: A History* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), 104.

[29] For biographical information on Ramsay, see Frend, *Archaeology of Early Christianity: A History*, 108–11, 130–35; W. M. Ramsay and Gertrude L. Bell, *The Thousand and One Churches*, ed. Mark P. C. Jackson and Robert Ousterhout (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2008), xi–xiv; W. Ward Gasque, *Sir William M. Ramsay: Archaeologist and New Testament Scholar. A Survey of His Contribution to the Study of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1966).

[30] W. M. Ramsay, *The Cities and Bishoprics of Phrygia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1897); W. M. Ramsay, *The Historical Geography of Asia Minor* (London: John Murray, 1890).

[31] W. M. Ramsay, *The Church in the Roman Empire Before A.D. 170* (London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1893), 9–11, 97–110; for an overview of the debate, see F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 3–18.

[32] The main texts for Ramsay's views regarding travel include *Historical Geography*, 23–87; *Church in the Roman Empire*, 3–169, 361–74; *St. Paul the Traveler and the Roman Citizen* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1898); *Seven Churches*, 1–34; "Roads and Travel," 375–402.

Ramsay claimed that any global social organization, such as Imperial Rome or the Christian Church, must administrate a complex communication infrastructure to ensure strength and survival.[33] Because Christians viewed themselves as universal, an organized communication system was essential to sustain their transregional network, just like political empires and international businesses maintained their own postal system. Travel allowed Christians to develop a self-consciously "universal" political body with the ability to organize and deploy resources. The prevalence of Christian travel led Ramsay to suppose "the existence of a large [postal] organization" with professional letter carriers.[34] Ramsay even depicts επίσκοποι as postmasters. They coordinated the system of hospitality for Christian messengers and letter correspondence with other congregations (cf. 1 Tim 3:2; 5:10; Titus 1:5–8; Herm. Vis., 2.4.3).[35] Christians adopted and systemized the ancient practices of letter-writing and travel to their own ends. This vital communication system among Christian communities had spiritual, political, and historical implications, each summarized in turn.

The spiritual vitality of the religious movement relied upon travel. Movement between Christian communities created a transregional identity, enhanced the reciprocal bonds of affection, and generated a larger purpose for struggling communities. Travel "bound together all the Provincial churches in the one Universal Church."[36] The very concept and reality of Christianity—i.e., a global community marked by love—were predicated upon communication. "From the first the Christian idea was to annihilate the separation due to space, and hold the most distant brother as near as the nearest."[37] The destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE meant Christianity lost its geographical center. Thus, the group transformed itself into a decentralized network of communities, made possible because of its advanced system of intercommunication.[38] As a result, "the subsequent development of the

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[33] Ramsay often overlooked other reasons for travel (e.g., evangelism, reconciliation, financial collection, and pilgrimage). He does not account for the full range of early Christian travels mentioned in letters.
[34] Ramsay, *Seven Churches*, 33–34. Subsequent scholarship has not adopted Ramsay's historical reconstruction due to a lack of evidence. The regular practice of travel did not necessitate an administered bureaucracy. Even without a developed "postal system," we can account for the abundance and meaning of Christian travel.
[35] The idea gets developed in Ramsay, *Church in the Roman Empire*, 364–69; Ramsay, *Seven Churches*, 31–33.
[36] Ramsay, *Seven Churches*, 21.
[37] Ramsay, *Church in the Roman Empire*, 365.
[38] Ramsay, *Church in the Roman Empire*, 364.

Church was determined greatly by the constant intercommunication of its parts and the stimulating influence thereby produced on the whole."[39]

Christians' early communication system positioned the church for political success. The Roman Empire relied upon movement, but the failure of the imperial government to provide a public postal service allowed the Church to establish itself as a rival organization.[40] Regular correspondence allowed Christians to govern themselves and maintain unity, thus creating an autonomous political body. Ramsay labels Christian epistles as "Imperial rescripts"[41] that decreed the will of God and subverted Roman hegemony. In Ramsay's widely-cited dictionary article, "Roads and Travel (in NT)," the opening paragraph asserts that the single motive of Rome's communication system was to connect all people and provinces with the capital, thus making Rome "the centre of the Empire."[42] Facilitating movement was a political act. The same article concludes by discussing early Christian travel and letter correspondence in similarly political terms. Like the classical orators praising Rome's travel infrastructure, Ramsay panegyrizes Christians' letter correspondence as a "remarkable development, in which law, statesmanship, ethics, and religion meet in and transform the simple letter."[43] Christians, through their travel systems, made themselves an emerging political group.

For Ramsay, Christians' intercommunication system possessed the interpretive power to explain two seminal historical events—Roman persecution and Constantine's adoption of the Christian religion. By "creating and managing its own rival administration,"[44] Christians became legitimate antagonists of the imperial authorities. Rome envied and persecuted Christians foremost for their developed social network. Later, Constantine welcomed the Church as "the one bond which could hold together the disintegrating Empire."[45] The savvy statesman recognized the social cohesion among Christians across the empire and co-opted

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[39] Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveler*, 39.
[40] Ramsay, *Seven Churches*, 22.
[41] Ramsay, *Seven Churches*, 29.
[42] Ramsay, "Roads and Travel," 376; for a similar imperial approach to Roman-era travel, see also Skeel, *Travel in the First Century After Christ*, esp. 140-45.
[43] Ramsay, "Roads and Travel," 402.
[44] Ramsay, *Seven Churches*, 34.
[45] Ramsay, *Seven Churches*, 34.

its political potential. Christianity eventually triumphed over Rome because "it did, and did better, what the Imperial policy was trying to do"—i.e., travel and communicate.[46]

Adolf von Harnack's influential history of the early Christian movement, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*, discusses travel along with hospitality in the spread of the Christian religion.[47] Harnack interprets Christian mobility through the broader narrative of the gospel's conquest over barbarian, Greek, and Roman societies.[48] Similar to Ramsay, Harnack views early Christian movement as imperialistic and triumphant. This reading of travel surfaces in three aspects of Harnack's work: Paul's missionary travel, charitable hospitality, and Rome's prominence.

Harnack's explanation of Paul's mission in Acts 16:6–8 illustrates his imperial interpretation of Christian travel.[49] Paul bypassed Asia and Bithynia because he had already "conquered the Hellenic world. Conscious of this religious and intellectual triumph," he proceeded westward into new Roman territory.[50] Travel to Rome, and farther west to Gaul and Spain, illustrates the dominance of the new universal religion over Jewish, barbarian, Greek, and then, ultimately, Latin societies. Like an imperial military campaign, Paul's missionary travel overcame peoples in rapid succession.

Harnack presented Christian "intercourse" (i.e., travel and care for travelers) as a primary manifestation of early Christianity's message of unconditional love and charity.[51] The charitable acts of sharing resources and visiting prisoners demonstrated brotherly unity and a common faith. After summarizing the movements of people and resources witnessed in the letters of Ignatius and Polycarp, Harnack concludes panegyrically: "What a wealth of

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[46] Ramsay, "Roads and Travel," 402.
[47] Adolf von Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*, trans. James Moffatt, vol. 1 (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1972).
[48] Harnack depicts Christian expansion as primarily ideological—the proclamation and adoption of a particular idea. People marked by certain anxieties longed for the "true religion." Michael L. White, "Adolf Harnack and the 'Expansion' of Early Christianity: A Reappraisal of Social History," *SecCent* 5, no. 2 (1985): 115–26 reappraises Harnack's expansion model, noting that social movements such as early Christianity require "networks of patrons" and a "small group of interconnected individuals" for successful growth.
[49] von Harnack, *Mission and Expansion*, 1:73–83.
[50] von Harnack, *Mission and Expansion*, 1:76.
[51] von Harnack, *Mission and Expansion*, 1:180–89.

intercourse there is between the churches! What public spirit! What brotherly care for one another!"[52] Travelers, as representatives of individual communities, united the church into one brotherhood. "The occasional travels of the brethren were frequently the means of bringing churches together which otherwise would have had no common tie."[53] Before the official synods and patriarchs of the third century, "the brotherly welcome extended to travelers and wanderers" unified the confederation of churches and manifested their common faith.[54] These brotherly links impressed outsiders and guaranteed church unity, which propelled its continual expansion through the Roman Empire.[55]

Travel and hospitality explain how the church in Rome emerged as the most prominent. Harnack interpreted the instances of Rome's hospitality and charitable travel as evidence of the church's "special obligation of caring for Christians in general." Such moral preeminence explains Rome's ecclesiastical prominence.[56] Based on the abundance of travel connections specifically with Rome,[57] Harnack claimed that Rome was the center of early Christianity's centripetal forces. Travel thus ensured the primacy of Rome in the universal Church. The gospel's rapid expansion into the imperial capital of Rome was a momentous step toward Christianity's eventual triumph over Rome.

Ramsay and Harnack's political interpretation of early Christian travel tried to reckon with the fuller social impact of Christian travel. Yet, they remained unduly shaped by the colonial impulses of their era. They refracted early Christian travel through the political narratives of nineteenth-century European imperialism.[58] The travel of Christians (especially to and from Rome) caused and signified the victory of Christianity over Rome. The triumphalist reading improperly reads early Christianity as an imperial power on par with Imperial Rome. (Travel does have political meaning but in a different sense, as we shall observe in our theological analysis.) Their political interpretation warrants a broader critique—namely, the eventual

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[52] von Harnack, *Mission and Expansion*, 1:191.
[53] von Harnack, *Mission and Expansion*, 1:179.
[54] von Harnack, *Mission and Expansion*, 1:483.
[55] von Harnack, *Mission and Expansion*, 1:376.
[56] von Harnack, *Mission and Expansion*, 1:179.
[57] von Harnack, *Mission and Expansion*, 1:369–78.
[58] For a recent imperial interpretation, see Justin Taylor, "St Paul and the Roman Empire: Acts of the Apostles 13-14," in *Teilband Religion*, ed. Wolfgang Haase, ANRW 26/2 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 1227–29. Also, Porter, "Travel in the Roman World," 1081, echoing Ramsay, claims that travel contributed "to the sense that the Christian movement was co-equal with the empire itself."

"triumph" of Christianity should not serve as the primary framework for interpreting Christian travel in prior centuries. Constructing history backward from Constantine I (r. 306–37 CE), as though the Edict of Milan (313 CE) was historically inevitable and climactic, misconstrues the meaning and effects of early Christian travel. The social and theological meaning of early Christian travel must stem from its contemporary milieu and not from the religious transformation of late antiquity. Though a fresh alternative to the long-prevailing traditional interpretation of early Christian travel, the political approach of Ramsay and Harnack yields anachronistic and inflated conclusions about the nature of early Christian travel.

§1.3 Social: Travel as Identity Formation

In the 1970s, New Testament and Early Christian studies experienced a "social turn." In contrast to earlier approaches that emphasized ideas and individuals, social historians began to analyze the collective patterns of Christian social groups. Of particular note, the social histories of Gerd Theissen and Wayne Meeks note how travel, mobility, and hospitality shaped early Christian identities.[59]

Gerd Theissen examines the wandering/itinerant charismatics in earliest Christianity. He claims that Jesus "called into being a movement of wandering charismatics," thus reframing the new movement in terms of its mobility and connection.[60] Theissen raises the "question of subsistence"—how did first-century Jewish renewal movements structure life in a meaningful way to sustain themselves? Unlike other groups that withdrew into seclusion (Essenes) or resorted to violence (Zealots), early Christ-followers wandered the countryside to construct their revolutionary social program. These "wandering charismatics" forsook home, family, possessions, and protection, then moved constantly among villages to proclaim Jesus' message. The beggar missionaries imitated Jesus by relying upon voluntary support from their hearers. Such radical vagrancy became part of the message and distinctive ethos of

[59] Another important social-science work is Malherbe, *Social Aspects of Early Christianity*, which emphasizes the broad mobility of early Christians (pp. 64–68) and interprets 3 John in the context of Christian itineration and hospitality (pp. 91–112).
[60] Gerd Theissen, *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 8.

the apocalyptic movement.[61] Itinerant radicalism authenticated the itinerants' divine calling, which legitimated their authority in local communities and helped them secure financial support. The itinerant lifestyle was possible because of small groups of local "sympathizers." These sedentary communities provided the hospitality and material provisions necessary for the itinerants' subsistence.[62] Such support defined their membership and role within the apocalyptic community. Theissen's reconstruction of early Palestinian Christianity draws attention to the movement's "social rootlessness," which he considers "the most striking phenomenon of the Jesus movement."[63] Travel created communal identities and became an essential component of the apocalyptic movement.

Theissen's subsequent article, "Legitimation and Subsistence: An Essay on the Sociology of Early Christian Missionaries," addresses the issue of itinerancy in Paul's conflict in Corinth.[64] He proposes that Paul and Barnabas represented a second type of itinerant preacher. They were "community organizers" who answered the "question of subsistence" by working as craftsmen. Their circumstances did not require them to accept assistance from Corinthian sympathizers. Compared to the "wandering charismatics" of Palestine, they were "community organizers" in Hellenistic contexts. So they enjoyed a privileged status and economic success, worked in urban cities over increased distances, and imitated the known social pattern of Cynic itinerant preachers.[65] Paul adopted the self-supporting model as a strategic decision to increase the effectiveness of his mission in new territories. Rather than graze among sympathizers, Paul sought to establish new groups in new territories,[66] and so positioned himself as an "independent itinerant" among the Corinthians. However, conflict emerged because the Corinthian Christians maintained the thinking of Paul's opponents—Paul's renunciation of personal financial support undermined his apostolic legitimacy and spiritual authority. The conflict in Corinth was rooted in different perspectives on the proper

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[61] John Dominic Crossan, "Jesus and the Kingdom: Itinerants and Householders in Earliest Christianity," in *Jesus at 2000*, ed. Marcus J. Borg (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 38.
[62] Theissen, *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity*, 17–23.
[63] Theissen, *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity*, 33.
[64] Gerd Theissen, "Legitimation and Subsistence: An Essay on the Sociology of Early Christian Missionaries," in *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 27–67, a translation of "Legitimation und Lebensunterhalt: Ein Beitrag zur Soziologie urchrislicher Missionare" in New Testament Studies 21 (1975): 192–221.
[65] Cf. Epictetus, *Diss.*, III:22–28, 69.
[66] Gerd Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1982), 40.

mode of subsistence for itinerating Christians. How should teachers sent from God subsist while traveling? In the Corinthians' mind, true apostles of Christ ought to rely upon others and accept support. Paul thus reinterprets the requirement of itinerant asceticism as an optional *privilege*, not an *obligation*.[67] This prevented wealthy Corinthians from attaining the social prestige of supporting the apostle and claiming him as their own.[68] In Theissen's approach, the Corinthian conflict was not strictly theological or personal. Competing notions about itinerancy and apostolic travel framed the social conflict and animated theological discourse.[69]

In his influential social history of the nascent Christian movement, *The First Urban Christians* (1983),[70] Wayne Meeks proposes that travel was pivotal in *de*constructing and then *re*constructing social identities in Pauline communities. Meeks first applies the sociological notion of status inconsistency, or status dissonance, to Pauline communities. In every society, the status of an individual or group is determined by a composite of status indicators, such as place of origin, birth family, wealth, occupation, age, gender, etc.[71] Status inconsistency emerges when a person ranks high in one sphere, but low in another. The discrepancy produces social dissonance and unpleasant experiences that people resolve by altering their social networks.[72] Meeks concluded that the most active and prominent members of Pauline congregations "were people of high status inconsistency."[73] Such social mobility was a function of physical mobility. The spread of Christianity in the Mediterranean region "was closely associated with personal mobility, both physical and social."[74] Christianity spread along the established routes of travel into strategically located cosmopolitan centers that lacked the conservatism of rural communities. They were places of change and movement, both physical and social.[75] The connectivity of cities with Pauline

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[67] Theissen, *Pauline Christianity*, 48.
[68] For more on Paul's refusal to play the patron-like role of itinerate teachers, see David E. Briones, *Paul's Financial Policy: A Socio-Theological Approach* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 163–67.
[69] Theissen, *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity*, 27.
[70] Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2003); Wayne A. Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality: The First Two Centuries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).
[71] Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 22.
[72] Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 55.
[73] Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 73.
[74] Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 16.
[75] Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 14–16.

communities (Rome, Ephesus, Corinth, Thessalonica, Philippi, Pisidian Antioch, etc.) facilitated ease of access for itinerants and also generated the status dissonance that inclined people toward religious change. In this broader cosmopolitan context, such physical and social mobility affected Christian individuals. For example, Aquila and Priscilla, originally from Pontus, were expelled from Rome and settled in Corinth and Ephesus, where they led and taught Christian assemblies, despite being refugees and artisans (Acts 18:2–3). They returned to Rome as Jewish migrants, yet occupied a prominent position within the house churches (Rom 16:3–4).[76] Travel destabilized people's status at both the macro level of cosmopolitan society and the personal level of individual roles. This resulting dissonance inclined people toward assuming a new social identity as Christians, as seen in Pauline communities.

In positive terms, physical mobility helped construct a worldwide identity among early Christians. Meeks notes that a peculiar dimension of nascent Christianity was how local communities viewed themselves as "part of a much larger, indeed ultimately worldwide, movement or entity."[77] Meeks observes four ways that transregional travel created a "translocal sensibility." One, the physical act of travel actively created translocal relationships. Paul's personal visits, letters, and messengers created relational interconnectedness.[78] Along with their personal presence, travelers brought greetings from distant people and groups, which reminded audiences of their translocal interrelatedness. Two, the accommodation required by Christian travelers (and requested through letters of recommendation) compelled hospitality exchanges that connected remote communities. Travel and hospitality fashioned a network of Christian patronage and friendship across space. The domestic hospitality afforded to travelers "was a most concrete reminder of what is meant to belong to the *ekklēsia* of God."[79] Three, travel fostered a translocal social identity by developing a broader court of reputation. By transmitting news and gossip, travelers carried the reputations of individuals and congregations to distant places (cf. 1 Thess. 1:8–9; 1 Cor 9:4). As a result, Christians participated in an honor group beyond their immediate

[76] Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 59.
[77] Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 75.
[78] Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 109.
[79] Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 110.

local communities.[80] With a new "effective reference group,"[81] Christians could experience a measure of renown in distant communities. Four, acts of travel and hospitality among Christians were symbolic reminders of Christians' identity as "resident aliens."[82] By receiving travelers, hosts remembered the exhortation that all Christians "have no lasting city, but we are looking for the city that is to come" (Heb 13:14; cf. 1 Clem., *insc*.). The physical mobility of traveling teachers exhibited the spiritual transience of all Christians. Hosting a traveler destabilized the host's sense of local rootedness and pointed toward another citizenship that Christians shared in common.

The sociological approaches of Theissen and Meeks examined the social impact of mobility among early Christians, especially those in Pauline communities. In their respective ways, they noted the prominence of travel (and hospitality) in forming the social identity and composition of early Christians. This social approach to early Christian travel rightly attends to the communal impact of travel upon its participants, thus offering a notable advancement compared to prior interpretations of early Christian travel. Of the five approaches discussed in this chapter, our hermeneutic aligns closest with this social approach of Theissen and Malherbe, albeit with the incorporation of additional methodological resources. Nevertheless, several shortcomings invite further inquiry. One, Theissen and Meeks approach travel in generalities. Theissen, for example, homogenizes the travel of the first Christian itinerants in Palestine into an anonymous, undifferentiated cluster of countryside teachers. His analysis of Paul does focus on a specific community, but it discusses itineration conceptually and abstractly. He does not analyze the individual travel events that fashioned Paul's relationships with the Corinthians. Meeks likewise lists some particular relocations of people, but overall speaks of the dislocation experienced by early Christians *en masse.* Two, they do not contextualize early Christian travel within its contemporary social institutions or the ancient practices that facilitated travel (the exception being Theissen's discussion of Stoic itinerants). As a result, we do not learn how early Christians travel compared or contrasted with other ancient methods of travel. Three, we should be careful to not interpret travel strictly in terms of the social causes and consequences correlated with it.[83] To avoid this functionalist approach to travel, we must also attend to the representations and meanings that

[80] Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 115.
[81] Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality*, 48; note that others prefer the phrase "court of reputation."
[82] Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality*, 105.
[83] On Theissen's functionalist approach, see Theissen, *Pauline Christianity*, 16–17.

the actors accorded to travel. Certain ideologies and theological narratives propelled their movement, and so should be noticed where possible. Social fact and social meaning inform and create one another; one should not be prioritized as more "real" than the other. Physical movement is imbued with meaning, and it creates new meaning for its participants. Through textual data and comparable social models for ancient travel, we should attend to how Christian travelers themselves understood the purpose and meaning of their movements.

§1.4 Network: Travel as Group Connectivity

A high degree of network connectivity resulted from travel between Christians. New Testament scholars Richard Bauckham and Cavan Concannon examine the network connectivity produced through travel. While both take a "network" approach, they are methodological distinct. Bauckham's work continues elements of the social interpretation (cf. §1.3), and Concannon's materialist approach harbors reservations about ideological factors like the post-colonial approach (cf. §1.5). As already noted at the outset, the five interpretative approaches discussed in this chapter are hardly rigid or distinct, but synthetic models for broader analysis. The two examples of "network" readings of early Christian travel bridge the social and postcolonial approaches.

In the edited volume, *The Gospel for All Christians*, Richard Bauckham and colleagues[84] challenge the long-standing assumption in Gospel scholarship that each Gospel was written for a specific local community. In response, they claim that the gospels were written for general circulation among an indefinite audience.[85] The evangelists were Christian leaders who were acquainted with multiple communities and so wrote "for any and every church which their Gospel might circulate."[86] This claim rests on the general character of the early Christian movement, which he depicts as "a network of communities with constant, close communication among themselves."[87] Because of travel, the churches were not disconnected from and unengaged with each other, as has long been assumed. Bauckham offers several

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[84] Esp. Thompson, "The Holy Internet."
[85] Richard Bauckham, ed., *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998).
[86] Richard Bauckham, "For Whom Were the Gospels Written?," in *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 46.
[87] Bauckham, "For Whom Were the Gospels Written?," 30.

points of evidence for the high degree of connectivity between Christians: They would have naturally participated in the high rates of mobility and communication in the first-century Roman world; early Christians perceived themselves as a worldwide movement; most Christian leaders in the New Testament traveled broadly; transmitting letters through messengers was a continuous practice of early Christians; second-century evidence exists of developed interchurch relations;[88] and conflict among diverse groups operated across the network of communication.[89] Because of the extent and intensity of communication among early Christians, the evangelists could rightfully envisage a broad circulation of their texts, which is what actually transpired, according to Bauckham. Abundant travel among early Christians created the network infrastructure to circulate texts. [90] Overall, Bauckham and others approach early Christian travel as the mere means of textual circulation. The authors would likely acknowledge other functions and meanings of travel, but in *The Gospels for All Christians*, they advance a narrow, functional view of travel for the purpose of their argument about Gospel audiences.

Cavan Concannon consciously incorporates a philosophical and theoretical approach to early Christian movement. He proposes travel and connectivity as the organizing framework for early Christian communities. In publications on Dionysios of Corinth,[91] Ignatius of Antioch,[92] and the Christian assembly in Philippi,[93] Concannon foregrounds network

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[88] I.e., Papias' prologue, Ignatius' letters, *Shephard of Hermas*.

[89] Bauckham, "For Whom Were the Gospels Written?," 32–44; Thompson, "The Holy Internet" expands these points to argue that Christians had the motivation and means to communicate, and so information such as gospel texts could, in fact, easily and quickly spread; for an opposing view, see David C. Sim, "The Gospels for All Christians? A Response to Richard Bauckham," *JSNT* 24, no. 2 (2001): 9–12 which argues that Christians were less unified, mobile, and communicative than Bauckham presents.

[90] David Smith, *The Epistles for All Christians: Epistolary Literature, Circulation, and* The Gospels for All Christians, *The Epistles for All Christians* (Leiden: Brill, 2020) furthers Bauckham's general thesis by arguing epistles also circulated broadly, just as their authors had intended. The epistles first circulated to multiple locales and then beyond their original audience, which reveals the networks' ability to facilitate such circulation.

[91] Cavan Concannon, *Assembling Early Christianity: Trade, Networks, and the Letters of Dionysios of Corinth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

[92] Cavan Concannon, "Early Christian Connectivity and Ecclesial Assemblages in Ignatius of Antioch," in *Across the Corrupting Sea: Post-Braudelian Approaches to the Ancient Eastern Mediterranean*, ed. Cavan Concannon and Lindsey A. Mazurek (London: Routledge, 2016), 65–90.

[93] Concannon, "Economic Aspects of Inter-City Travel among Pauline Assemblies"; Cavan Concannon, "'Let Us Know Anything Further Which You Have Heard': Mapping Philippian Connectivity," in *Philippi: From* Colonia Augusta *to* Communitas Christiana*: Religion and Society in Transition*, ed. Steve Friesen, Daniel Schowalter, and Michalis Lychounas (Leiden: Brill, 2021).

connectivity, which yields "an assemblage approach to early Christian historiography."[94] The foundational assumption is that travel affects network connectivity. Movement across space shaped Christian communities across time and space. This approach utilizes *Annaliste* historiography, which eschewed famous events and people in favor of routes and movement.[95] In the words of the *Annaliste* historian Fernand Braudel, "The whole Mediterranean consists of movement in space."[96] The constant connectivity and distribution of resources networked the Mediterranean landscape and fashioned its society.[97] This historiographical approach leads Concannon to reimagine early Christian history in terms of movement and connectivity instead of leaders and ideas.[98]

Concannon also highlights the significant costs involved in creating and maintaining the connectivity space. In speaking about "networks" of Christians, he emphasizes "the *work* that is done to make and maintain a *net* of relationships."[99] The movement of bodies, objects, and ideas across space requires great expense.[100] So histories of early Christianity must account for the full costs of social connectivity.[101] Travel was a costly means of network formation. The substantive costs of connectivity made the network of Christian assemblies tenuous and shifting. Connections between distant groups were fragile and temporary, always dependent upon sustained levels of travel. Overall, Concannon proposes that historians approach "early Christianity as a series of (occasionally) interconnected networks or assemblages of people,

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[94] Concannon, *Assembling Early Christianity*, 26, 34.
[95] Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II, Vol. 1*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996); for Concannon's summary of Braudel, see Cavan Concannon and Lindsey A. Mazurek, "Introduction: A New Connectivity for the Twenty-First Century," in *Across the Corrupting Sea: Post-Braudelian Approaches to the Ancient Eastern Mediterranean*, ed. Cavan Concannon and Lindsey A. Mazurek (London: Routledge, 2016), 1–16.
[96] Braudel, *The Mediterranean*, 1:277.
[97] Horden and Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea*.
[98] Concannon, "Economic Aspects of Inter-City Travel among Pauline Assemblies," 344; cf. Geoffrey Smith, "Towards a 'Text-Market' Approach to Early Christianity," in *Across the Corrupting Sea: Post-Braudelian Approaches to the Ancient Eastern Mediterranean*, ed. Cavan Concannon and Lindsey A. Mazurek (London: Routledge, 2016), 112.
[99] Concannon, *Assembling Early Christianity*, 53.
[100] On this point, Concannon, *Assembling Early Christianity*, 61, 230, cites the work of French sociologist Bruno Latour, *The Pasteurization of France*, trans. Alan Sheridan and John Law (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 162: "If there are identities between actants, this is because they have been constructed at great expense . . . If there are exchanges, these are always unequal and cost a fortune both to establish and to maintain."
[101] Concannon, *Assembling Early Christianity*, 61–64.

resources, objects, literature, and spaces" that emerge and dissipate as they participate in the broader flow of the ancient Mediterranean.[102] This emphasis on transience and fragility stands in contrast to the permeance and dominance that Ramsay and Harnack noted about early Christians' travel.

Bauckham and Concannon emphasize that travel created a widespread and active "intercommunicating network" among the churches. While affording new historical insights, their functionalist approach eschews theology and analyzes travel only in terms of its social effect—travel yields network connectivity. Bauckham's approach overlooks Christians' own representations of travel and the social meaning of the constant movement. The movement of people across space is the mere plumbing for circulating Gospel texts. Similarly, Concannon examines the nature of linkages created by physical movement but never the social meaning or symbolic significance of travel. For example, he explores the interactions between Polycarp and the Philippian church as "the constant motion of agents [e.g., pottery, wind patterns, and sea currents[103]] moving to and fro along the coast of the north Aegean," yet sets aside Polycarp's "spiritual musings."[104] Theological discourse associated with travel is a secondary, rhetorical rationalization of material facts. In this materialist approach, theology is epiphenomenal. This reduces the social fact of travel to a mere technic or function. This reflects a weakness of *Annaliste* historiography, which interpreted physical mobility in physical and structuralist terms. Their histories depict Mediterranean history as akin to a giant ant colony—a profusion of indiscriminate and automated movements lacking cultural representations. Geographical and environmental forces such as alluvial sedimentation shape mobility more than social ideology or human agency.[105] This post-humanist approach to religion and history centers non-anthropological agents, resulting in a history without humans.[106] Irad Malkin, in his network analysis of Greek colonies, *A Small Greek World*, exposes the cracks of Braudel's approach. The structuralist approach identifies the networks, but "pays little attention to the formative dynamics of the networks that allow for

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[102] Concannon, *Assembling Early Christianity*, 23.
[103] Cf. Concannon, *Assembling Early Christianity*, 47, 54, 61–65, 73, 103.
[104] Concannon, "'Let Us Know Anything Further Which You Have Heard': Mapping Philippian Connectivity," 202–03.
[105] Horden and Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea*, 383–86.
[106] For a critique of anti-humanist approaches to materiality, see Laura Salah Nasrallah, *Archaeology and the Letters of Paul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 36–39.

connectivity."[107] Malkin argues that the mobilities of colonization, migration, and trade did not just functionally connect the Greek world but also formed an overarching identity among Greeks.[108] Travel consolidated Hellenic identity as a self-aware civilization and promoted a broader social awareness. Physical movement not only connected people (as per Braudel); it also defined them.

Despite their insights into the aggregate effect of travel in early Christianity, the network interpretations of Bauckham and Concannon downplay the theological and social meanings of early Christian travel. Travel, it must be noted, had social *meaning,* not only social *effects*. Christian travel reveals ideological thoughts and theological commitments. People had a reason for traveling. Within their cognitive world, they stood to gain and benefit from physical moving from one location to another. Such ideas were not mere "spiritual musings," but critical elements of the travel act. Each travel event can thus be interpreted within its social context for meaning and significance beyond its materialist or social function. The act of travel not only linked communities and transmitted texts but also embodied the values and identity of early Christians. Therefore, we can also examine the social ideologies, human agencies, and theological convictions attending early Christian travel.

§1.5 Postcolonial: Travel as Hegemonic Power

Since the advent of postcolonial thought in the late twentieth century, biblical interpreters have raised questions that expose and critique hegemonic social structures.[109] These critical readings generally discount theological claims and suspect texts as being masks for power. In recent decades, postcolonial New Testament scholars have reassessed the traditional view of travel, particularly the traditional notion of Paul as an ideal and courageous missionary traveler.

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[107] Irad Malkin, *A Small Greek World: Networks in the Ancient Mediterranean* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 44.
[108] Malkin, *A Small Greek World*, 205–19 passim.
[109] For a history and summary of postcolonialism, see R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Exploring Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: History, Method, Practice* (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 7–31; Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1979) is often credited with inaugurating postcolonial criticism.

In *Transient Apostle: Paul, Travel, and the Rhetoric of Empire*, Timothy Luckritz Marquis explores how Paul, in 2 Cor 1–9, appropriates travel motifs to fashion his persona as an "apostle" before the Corinthian community.[110] The mobility required to form a worldwide community created tensions for Paul. For one, the ancients were suspicious of such unsettled wanderers cursed with homelessness. The peripatetic lifestyle was vulnerable and potentially deceptive, so it was a regular source of social shame.[111] Moreover, Paul's refusal of material support created suspicions that he was an insincere fraud.[112] Because of these social liabilities associated with travel, the success of Paul's mission required him to reimagine the cultural meanings of his itineration. To this end, Paul rhetorically adopts and adapts travel imagery to subtly cast himself as a divine ambassador with legitimate authority. Ancient discourses regarding traveling gods, epic heroes, famous exiles, foreign moralists, and homeward-bound sages all become metaphorical topoi for his rhetorical self-presentation as a "Wandering Apostle."

To discern how Paul constructed his apostolic and leadership role, Luckritz Marquis offers a detailed exegesis of Paul's travel motifs in 2 Cor 1–9. I summarize several of his principal interpretations. In 2 Cor 1, Paul issues a "travel apology" to explain his failed visit by depicting himself as a sage who contemplated, yet rejected, the noble option of self-killing—i.e., the final journey of the soul—so that he could journey to the Corinthians for their sake. Paul's triumph language in 2 Cor 2:14–17 recasts his shameful travel as the triumph of a foreign, traveling god, thus making Paul a divine herald, not a religious charlatan. Paul also evokes ancient discourses regarding praiseworthy ambassadors (2 Cor 5) to defuse suspicious and shameful elements of his travel. When refusing funds, Paul was, in fact, benevolently self-funding his mediatorial mission. By defining his social role through common travel imagery, Paul explains and even exploits potentially detrimental aspects of his itinerant lifestyle to regain his leadership role in Corinth. The cultural ambivalence of "wandering" makes the travel motif suitable for uniting disparate social forces into a dynamic new social movement.

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[110] Timothy Luckritz Marquis, *Transient Apostle: Paul, Travel, and the Rhetoric of Empire* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2013).

[111] Luckritz Marquis, *Transient Apostle*, 8–10.

[112] On this point, Luckritz Marquis follows Gerd Theissen's thesis that Paul's distinct practice of self-funding explains the problems between him and the Corinthians; cf. *Transient Apostle*, 13, 41–44, 57.

Luckritz Marquis' postcolonial reading of Paul's rhetoric situates the apostle in ancient political contexts. Though an imperial subject and member of an ethnic minority, Paul recycles imperial language and "replicates strategies of domination" in 2 Cor 1–9.[113] This ensured his hegemony and consolidated the turbulent new social movement.[114] The postcolonial Paul was not actually an apostle commissioned by God but a self-constructed demagogue presenting himself as such.[115] This method highlights the role of rhetorical framing in constructing and transmitting the meaning of early Christian mobility. *Transient Apostle* presents the most sustained postcolonial analysis of Paul's travel, and other book chapters offer similar reassessments.

In *Archaeology and the Letters of Paul*, Laura Salah Nasrallah offers a feminist and postcolonial approach to the apostle. Chapter 3, "On Travel and Hospitality: The Letter to the Galatians and an Inscription from Galatia," surveys an imperial decree from Pisidia (*SEG* 26:1392) that opposed and delimited the requisitions that Roman soldiers demanded from communities.[116] Within this social pattern, Nasrallah presents early Christian itinerants as burdensome guests, akin to abusive Roman officials traveling through the provinces. Paul and Peter "imposed" themselves upon the communities in Galatia.[117] Nasrallah's approach draws attention to the burdens that travelers foisted upon hosts, thus reimagining the social and political dimensions of Christian travel. Like Roman soldiers on the march, the itinerating Jewish apostles exploit and abuse local communities. (In §3.2, I evaluate Nasrallah's theory in further detail, but here note her postcolonial interpretation of travel.)

Ryan S. Schellenberg explores the precarious and contingent nature of Paul's travels in his chapter, "'Danger in the wilderness, danger at sea': Paul and the Perils of Travel."[118] Schellenberg problematizes the traditional depictions of Paul as a courageous and resolute apostle, arguing that Paul's references to travel indicate hardship and uncertainty. Paul's catalog of travel hardships contains complaints of danger and genuine trials, not instances of

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[113] Luckritz Marquis, *Transient Apostle*, 11.
[114] Luckritz Marquis, *Transient Apostle*, 17.
[115] Cf. Timothy Luckritz Marquis, "Travel and Homelessness," in *T&T Clark Handbook to the Historical Paul*, ed. Ryan S. Schellenberg and Heidi Wendt (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2022), 87–102.
[116] Laura Salah Nasrallah, "On Travel and Hospitality: The Letter of Galatians and an Inscription from Galatia," in *Archaeology and the Letters of Paul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 76–104.
[117] Nasrallah, "Travel and Hospitality," 101.
[118] Schellenberg, "Perils of Travel."

rhetorical paradox. The self-proclaimed apostle was a woeful and stricken wanderer who laments his vulnerable and shameful homelessness.[119] Moreover, Paul's references to failed travel plans demonstrate the extent to which his movements were contingent upon various everyday realities.[120] Despite great eagerness to visit the Thessalonians, Paul's ability and agency to travel was circumscribed; while imprisoned, Paul could only, at best, hope to visit his audience (Phil 1:27; 2:23–24; Phlm 22). Though Paul chose not to visit the Corinthians (2 Cor 1:23–24) for their sake, his options were limited, perhaps because the Corinthians would not have welcomed him. Gritty realities such as danger, subsistence, and social conflicts determined Paul's travel. The itinerant Paul, according to Schellenberg, was not guided by a sense of mission, which suggests a religious and evangelistic impetus. Rather, Paul was a skilled artisan whose travel to prominent cities was motivated by subsistence requirements and economic opportunities.[121] Paul's travels were contingent movements guided by material needs, not functions of a broader theological framework or social identity.

The postcolonial readings problematize traditional presentations of Paul and his travel, often by reconsidering the social and material aspects of ancient travel. They tend to discount the authors' own representations of travel (e.g., Rom 1:1–15; 15: 15–21; Gal 2:1–10; Col 1:25–26; 2 Cor 10:13–16; Eph 3:1–7)[122] and impose a deconstructionist interpretation. This approach interprets the rhetorical presentations and hidden agendas of corporeal movement, which often imposes an anachronistic reading of ancient Christian travel and foregrounds modern political anxieties about power and privilege. This minimizes the historical task of interpreting ancient peoples within their frameworks. Through travel, people present themselves. Therefore, it remains the task of historians, as Clifford Geertz noted about ethnology, to pay attention to the means of their experience, the logic of practice that guides their steps.[123] The methodological approach of this work is to reconstruct, as best as we moderns can, the conceptual frameworks that unite actions, words, ideas, and interactions around travel.

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[119] Schellenberg, "Perils of Travel," 147–51.
[120] Schellenberg, "Perils of Travel," 151–55; cf. Terence Donaldson, "'The Field God Has Assigned': Geography and Mission in Paul," in *Religious Rivalries in the Early Roman Empire and the Rise of Christianity*, ed. Leif E. Vaage (Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006), 109–38.
[121] Schellenberg, "Perils of Travel," 155–58.
[122] Donaldson, "Geography and Mission in Paul," 126–32.
[123] Geertz, "Making Experiences, Authoring Selves," esp. 373.

§1.6 Conclusions

The distances that early Christians traveled and the rapid expansion of Christianity were marked features of the early social movement. This fact has elicited diverse interpretations. Early Christian travel has been variously understood in terms of mission expansion (traditional), imperial triumph (political), identity formation (social), group connectivity (network), and hegemonic power (postcolonial). From this diversity of historical interpretations, we can reason that the prevalence of Christian travel requires *some* interpretation. Historians have long intuited that travel is neither meaningless nor strictly pragmatic, but symbolic and creative. Travel *means* something and *does* something. However, the significance and function of early Christian travel is not self-evident; it requires some interpretation.

The interpretations ascribed to early Christian travel have been affected by the interpreter's historical location. In all five approaches, scholars interpreted travel according to the social priorities and historiographical methods of their own era, yielding etic more than emic readings. Each view reveals some insights about early Christian travel, but not without limitations.

The traditional approach raises (perhaps assumes) the question of theological meanings and evangelistic motivations, but is overly determined and limited by the single factor of mission expansion, due to contemporary concerns and interests. The imperial approach relies too much upon anachronistic assumptions of colonial Europe and reaches inflated conclusions about the political meaning and organization of early Christian travel. The social approach helpfully draws attention to the identity formation elements of travel, but tends to equate the meaning of travel with the correlated social effects of that travel, yielding an overly functionalist view of the act. The network approach observes the connectivity and potentialities of ties created through travel, but notes only the material aspects of the resulting assemblage and thus fails to consider the meaning-making ideologies of the participants who traveled. The postcolonial approach rightly attends to authorial representations of travel, but its focus on exposing the political agendas behind the texts risks imposing current anxieties on historical events.

In addition to the above critiques about individual approaches to early Christian travel, we can note four general shortcomings about prior scholarship on the topic. One, the various approaches tend to homogenize early Christian travel events. The many individual acts of travel, each performed by different people for different reasons in different places, get blended into a broad, generalized notion of travel. Each travel event features a distinctive context, location, reason, purpose, benefit, agent, and, thus, meaning. So discussing travel in generic terms reduces diverse travel experiences into a single, and perhaps artificial, reality. The result is that early Christian travel becomes abstract, and the particular physical movements of individual peoples fail to get differentiated. While no approach can analyze every travel event in early Christianity, I pursue a more granular analysis of a few particular travel events to discern their social meaning and significance. Two, prior approaches provide little exegesis of the texts that discuss travel. As a result, the authors' own representations of travel are glossed over. The postcolonial approach is the most attentive to the travelers' meaning-making discourse, but for the purpose of deconstructing ploys rather than depicting the symbolic universe of the actor. Three, the various interpretative approaches rarely incorporate ancient social models to contextualize early Christian travel. Social models for ancient travel, whether derived from texts or from archaeology, can help expose the implicit framework in which the travelers (and their spectators) likely interpreted their own movements. They anchor travel in its proper cultural and historical context. Four, the relationship between the social and the theological is rarely acknowledged. The socially-embedded act of travel was also a theological expression since it was performed within some ideological narrative. The social phenomenon of travel is inflected with meanings and intentions. Without prioritizing one as real and the other as epiphenomenal, we can expect and explore the dialectical relationship between the social event and the theological meaning. Their influence is mutual—ideology propels movement, and movement generates ideas. In response to these four general shortcomings of prior approaches to travel, this thesis aims to analyze concrete instances of travel by taking heed of authorial representations and parallel ancient social institutions in order to discern their socio-theological meaning.

As noted above, the interpretation of each historical approach to early Christian travel was influenced by the author's own social and intellectual context. For this reason, we must more consciously consider how to exegete physical movement. What frameworks allow us to discern the meaning of ancient travel? How might we interpret non-discursive social behavior? Chapter 2 introduces theoretical resources for discerning the meaning(s) of travel.

Chapter 2: A Model for Interpreting Travel

Movement—the corporeal act of changing physical location—forms the raw material of travel. As people move through time and space, we can observe their physical relocation. Movement is embodied and somatic—and thus tangible and observable. However, the significance of movement does not present itself as being readily apparent. The *meaning* of travel is distinct from the *fact* of travel. Our inquiry into travel among early Christians must interpret physical movements. How might we discern the meaning associated with such a non-discursive action, especially one so pedestrian as physical movement?

Goran Therborn's political concept of "ideology" examines forms of meaning that are not set out as coherent, verbalized doctrines. The operation of ideology in daily life "basically involves the constitution and patterning of how human beings live their lives as conscious, reflecting initiators of acts in a structured, meaningful world."[1] The analytical utility of this concept for interpreting ancient travel lies in how it links everyday actions with schemas of meaning. Ideological beliefs are not sets of propositions or intellectual positions. They are structures of meaning that shape behavior.[2]

An example regarding household patterns illustrates how domestic movement performs ideology. Status and hierarchy within a family govern bodily movements within a house. Authority constricts access to certain rooms of a house, as only heads of the household (e.g., parents, *paterfamilias*) can move into the largest bedroom; in turn, that movement further constructs those spaces and ingrains authority. Also, movement into particular spaces of food preparation (i.e., indoor kitchen vs. outdoor grill) replicates notions of gender. During hospitality encounters when the home is opened to non-residents, guests are permitted into a common area but not into personal living spaces. Through habitual performance, movement becomes an active force in producing physical spaces, social roles, and ideological beliefs.

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[1] Goran Therborn, *The Ideology of Power and the Power of Ideology* (London; New York: Verso, 1999), 15. My use of the term "ideology" (and its adjectival form, "ideological") throughout refers to "a related set of ideas and beliefs of a group." This sense is general (thus including social and theological elements) and unloaded (i.e., not referring to a political analysis of power and its mis/uses, as the term gets used in some critical discourse).

[2] Tim Cresswell, *In Place/Out of Place: Geography, Ideology, and Transgression* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 16.

The encoded movement contributes to the continuation of the family identity and order. In the home, ideologies pattern movements, and movements, in turn, reinforce ideologies.

Therborn's theoretical concept of "ideology" primes us to expect meaning and significance in physical movement across space. Like all human practices, the act of travel is "enmeshed in ideology, but [emerges] as specific, institutionalized practices."[3] The act of physical relocation functions as an ideological practice, as it occurs within a particular social context. As an ancient Chinese proverb states, "It is not our feet that move us along—it is our minds."

To discern *what* travel means requires us to know *how* non-discursive physical movement could reflect ideology. By what means does travel assume meaning? Towards this aim, this chapter employs an assemblage of critical theories for exegeting the social (and, eventually, theological) significance of ancient travel. First, I explore the emerging field of mobility studies to discern how travel bears *meaning* (§2.1). Second, I discuss how travel functions as an economic event with particular costs and benefits to uncover the *value* derived from travel (§2.2). The final section analyzes the *identity* of travelers and their hosts (§2.3). The three social aspects of travel discussed in this chapter—i.e., meaning, value, and identity—together form a model for discerning the historical, social, and theological dimensions of travel events among early Christians. This tripartite hermeneutical approach to travel has several benefits. It reveals the foundational elements of travel that get imbued with meaning, raises helpful questions about the fundamental elements of travel without constraining the results, can interpret any specific travel event to avoid homogenizing all Christian movement, and touches upon aspects of travel that prove important in early Christian texts.

§2.1 The Meaning of Travel

Since 2000, the disciplines of sociology and geography have become increasingly concerned with mobility and movement.[4] This "mobility turn" challenges the "sedentarism" of past

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[3] Therborn, *Ideology of Power*, 2.

[4] For brief histories of the mobility turn in the social sciences, see Mimi Sheller, "Sociology after the Mobilities Turn," in *The Routledge Handbook of Mobilities*, ed. Peter Adey et al. (New York: Routledge, 2014), 45–54; Rafal Szymanowski, "The Mobility Turn in the Social Science," in *Cultures of Motorway: Localities through Mobility as an Anthropological Issue*, ed. Agata Stanisz and Waldemar Kuligowski

social thought and explores the movement of people, goods, and ideas, along with its social consequences. Mobilities research combines social and spatial theory to illustrate "how various kinds of 'moves' make social and material realities."[5]

In his seminal work *Sociology Beyond Societies* (2000), John Urry argues that "mobilities, as both metaphor and as process are at the heart of the social life and thus should be central to the sociological analysis." [6] Movement produces cultural forms and sustains patterns of sociality. Corporeal travel events constitute the structures of social life and constantly (re)form cultural identity. Sociality and identity are produced not only through associations with bounded spaces but through the movement of people, ideas, and things.

The notion of *automobility* is an example of the new sociology of mobility.[7] As a symbol of freedom and exploration, cars provide access to new social meanings but also have profound implications for the nature of our social world as people. Automobility has created new matrices of power, geography, and social identities. Also, depending upon the narrative surrounding vehicular movement, driving could be liberating ("road trip"), stressful ("work commute"), or guilt-inducing ("emitting pollution").[8] In the last 120 years, automobility has created new social experiences and meanings for people.

While the mobility paradigm has largely analyzed the globalized, modern era, the publications of Tim Cresswell offer insightful conceptual resources for understanding all types of movement, including ancient travel. This section highlights his theories regarding mobility, then outlines six aspects of mobility as a practical framework for interpreting the meaning of travel.

(Wielichowo: TIPI, 2016), 183–93; Tim Cresswell, "Mobilities I: Catching Up," *Progress in Human Geography* 35, no. 4 (2010): 550–58.

[5] Monika Büscher, John Urry, and Katian Witchger, *Mobile Methods* (London; New York: Routledge, 2010), 2.

[6] John Urry, *Sociology Beyond Societies: Mobilities for the Twenty-First Century* (London: New York: Routledge, 2000), 49.

[7] Urry, *Sociology Beyond Societies*, 57–63; Peter Merriman, *Mobility, Space and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 63–150.

[8] Tim Cresswell, "Towards a Politics of Mobility," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 28, no. 1 (2010): 20.

§2.1.1 Mobility Studies

Geographer Tim Cresswell, a leading mobility researcher, has examined the social constructions of "movement" in several works.[9] His work uncovers the nuanced meaning(s) of movement, and so proves useful to interpreting travel among early Christians. Creswell recognizes how movement is a universal fact of life. Throughout our lives, people experience the world through motion. At the most basic level, motion constitutes life itself; a body without the capacity for any kind of mobility (including no internal movement of organs) is pronounced "dead" and placed into the earth. Because movement is so universal and necessary, it plays a central role in social ideologies. Every cultural worldview must somehow explain movement, or "produce mobility." However, the sheer ubiquity of human movement often conceals its potential for meaning. So narratives of mobility are portrayed as self-evident or universal. Cresswell notes that mobility's status as a "necessary social production" makes knowledge around mobility "so important and so deeply implicated" in the politics of societies, yet overlooked as banal or nugatory.[10]

Movement is rarely neutral, for it "carries with it the burden of meanings."[11] The bare fact of movement is not simply about getting from A to B, for "the line that connects them, despite its apparent immateriality, is both meaningful and laden with power."[12] As narratives are woven around mobilities, they assume representations. For example, the simple act of walking, depending on the social context, could be burdensome or liberating, educational or tedious, transgressive or admirable. Physical movement is encoded culturally and socially through "narratives of worthiness, morality, and aesthetics."[13] Kinetic movement becomes social discourse through ideological stories.

As technology and social changes have altered the nature of physical movement, ideas about mobility have likewise changed throughout history. Cresswell illustrates this phenomenon in

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[9] Cresswell, *In Place/Out of Place: Geography, Ideology, and Transgression*; Tim Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004); Tim Cresswell, *On The Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Cresswell, "Politics of Mobility"; Cresswell, "Mobilities I."
[10] Cresswell, *On The Move*, 22.
[11] Cresswell, *On The Move*, 6.
[12] Cresswell, *On The Move*, 9.
[13] Cresswell, "Politics of Mobility," 20.

a diachronic analysis of mobilities throughout European history.[14] In the feudal society of medieval Europe, peasants were tied to the land, and masters controlled their right to move. Movement placed a person at the margins, outside of social obligations rooted in place. Then, in the sixteenth century, the rise of mercantile capitalism necessitated mobility for purposes of trade. As the Enlightenment dawned, political philosopher Thomas Hobbes equated movement with liberty; unimpeded movement signified true human freedom. More recently, the adjective *modern* entails a sense of movement. Mobility has become a right of the modern individual, and the modern age has been imagined in terms of technologies of mobility—the steamship, the car, the airplane, the space rocket. This historical summary illustrates the shifting ways Europeans have thought about mobility. As Cresswell notes, "The movement of people has been central to the construction of worldview in wildly different ways."[15]

From an anthropological perspective, Noel Salazar approaches mobilities to discern "the multiple meanings attached to various forms of movement, both for individuals and societies at large."[16] He notes that geographical movement "is always invested with social meaning"[17] because of its "embeddedness within societies, culture, politics, and histories."[18] The result is often competing narratives about the meaning of movement, "a contested ideological construct."[19] Mobility derives meaning from wider socio-cultural structures, so movement must always be analyzed within specific contexts.[20] In sum, travel always means something, but it rarely means the same thing depending on the social context and ideological framing. The fact of movement is universally experienced yet particularly defined.[21] In light of this reality, subsequent chapters on early Christian travel will discuss various social institutions for ancient travelers (e.g., hospitality, *amicus domini*, πρόξενια, prison visits, embassies) that

[14] Cresswell, *On The Move*, 9–21 passim.
[15] Cresswell, *On The Move*, 21.
[16] Noel B. Salazar, "Anthropology," in *The Routledge Handbook of Mobilities*, ed. Peter Adey et al. (New York: Routledge, 2014), 55–63, here 55; Noel B. Salazar, "Towards an Anthropology of Cultural Mobilities," *Crossings: Journal of Migration and Culture* 1, no. 1 (2010): 53–68.
[17] Salazar, "Anthropology," 59.
[18] Salazar, "Anthropology," 60.
[19] Salazar, "Anthropology," 61.
[20] Salazar, "Towards an Anthropology," 64.
[21] Cresswell, "Mobilities I," 550.

form the implicit social framework by which meaning was ascribed to the specific travel events.[22]

The extensive travel of early Christians occurred within larger ideological frameworks. Their movement was not strictly functional or devoid of meaning but itself represented certain ideas about social reality and God's purposes in the world. In each instance of early Christian travel discussed hereafter, our principal authors counter alternative meanings of certain movements. Mobility theorists offer important critical insights for interpreting early Christian movement. To summarize, mobility: is a universal phenomenon with foundational yet concealed meaning, assumes meaning through narratives, and possesses different meanings according to contexts. Building upon these theoretical insights, Cresswell has developed a practical model for assessing six aspects of mobility, which proves useful for interpreting specific travel events.

§2.1.2 Six Aspects of Mobility

Most mobility research to date evaluates the contemporary social world in light of increasing globalization and mobile technologies. Critical mobility theorists often rhapsodize about the rapid increase and dramatic impact of mobility in the twenty-first century.[23] The resulting impression is that previous eras were static and immobile, and thus lacked experiences and ideologies of movement. However, Cresswell has questioned the ostensible newness of

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[22] The institutions utilized for interpreting early Christian travel in this thesis derive more from Greco-Roman than Jewish contexts. This is for two reasons. One, the travel events discussed here occurred within Greco-Roman contexts. While Paul did seemingly maintain a strategy of traveling to (and likely staying with) Jewish communities in his travels (Rom 1:16; Acts 13:46; 17:2), the five travel events analyzed here were to and from non-Jewish communities. (This would include Paul's travel to Galatia, in which he was re-routed by Sergius Paulus into Galatia and found mostly Gentile communities there.) The other issue is the lack of suitable Jewish comparanda for travel. Our information about Jewish travel is mostly literary (cf. Uusimäki, "Itinerant Sages") or from later rabbinic material (cf. Hezser, *Jewish Travel in Antiquity*). The fact that diaspora communities transported the annual temple tax to Jerusalem, alongside the "Theodotos Inscription" (*CIIP* 9), suggests a measure of travel infrastructure among Jewish communities. However, most evidence of Jewish travel appears to have been to and from the temple in Jerusalem, which is not directly comparable to the travel events discussed herein. Plus, we have sparse first-hand interpretations of their travel. However, even their travel likely adopted the Greco-Roman institutions of intercivic travel discussed herein.

[23] Szymanowski, "The Mobility Turn in the Social Science," 189; the new mobility era typically begins with the 1990s or the dawn of the twenty-first century.

mobility, noting that "people and things have always moved and mobility did not start in the twenty-first century or even with the industrial revolution."[24] Even before our hypermobile era, people have always moved, and that movement has been ideologically laden (especially in the Roman Imperial era!). Therefore, mobilities studies can help chart historical constellations of mobility. However, accessing ancient meanings of travel is challenging. We cannot utilize the customary data for travel that contemporary mobility theorists access, such as qualitative analysis or participatory investigation.[25] Moreover, the ideological frameworks around ancient travel are not the same as those which give meaning to travel in twenty-first-century societies. We ought not assume that ancient peoples attached the same ideologies and narratives to travel as modern people. So we must employ a hermeneutical framework that discerns how travel is encoded with meaning.

Tim Cresswell, in his article "Towards a Politics of Mobility," presents a theoretical approach for interpreting mobility. It offers "a way of accounting for the historical sense of movement."[26] I deploy but also adapt his analytical model to assess early Christian travel.[27] According to Creswell, all forms of movement involve six constitutive elements by which mobility gets encoded with political and social meaning(s). The six aspects are: motive, velocity, rhythm, route, experience, and (according to my adaptation) identity. I explain the six principal elements through a set of questions that will help us interpret early Christian travel.

1. Motive, or reason. Why does a person move? What forces propel them across time-space? Are those pressures internal or external, voluntary or involuntary? In a contemporary example, two people—a victim of human trafficking and a jet-setting businessperson—may

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[24] Cresswell, "Mobilities I," 555.
[25] George Revill, "Histories," in *The Routledge Handbook of Mobilities*, ed. Peter Adey et al. (New York: Routledge, 2014), 506.
[26] Cresswell, "Politics of Mobility," 26.
[27] Cresswell's sixth aspect was "friction," which I combined with the second aspect, "velocity, or speed." The new sixth aspect presented here is "subject identities," a concept adapted and used from Tim Cresswell and Peter Merriman, "Introduction: Geographies of Mobilities — Practices, Spaces, Subjects," in *Geographies of Mobilities: Practices, Spaces, Subjects*, ed. Peter Merriman and Tim Cresswell (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), 9–11. For a parallel model, see also, Peter Adey et al., eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Mobilities* (New York: Routledge, 2014) chs. 9–16, which analyzes eight qualities of mobility: friction, slowness and deceleration, distance and proximity, net locality, ethics and responsibilities, times, rhythm and arrhythmia, and enthusiasm.

travel on the same flight but with quite distinct motives or reasons. For early Christians, what propelled travel—political pressures, missionary strategy, social connections, etc.? We can ask related questions about the end point of movements. When and how does a person stop moving? What causes immobility? Socio-political dynamics push people towards movement, which can have multiple, interrelated causes.

2. Velocity, or speed. How fast does a person move? The rate of travel carries political meaning. The ability to get somewhere rapidly is often associated with exclusivity or connectivity. Elites bolt across space-time as a function of their freedom and importance, whereas laborers who are pushed to work faster have a servile status. How did early Christians interpret their rate of travel? Do they attribute delays, slowness, and redirections to political opposition, divine assistance, and/or other factors?

3. Rhythm, or regularity. In what pattern does a person move? Henri Lefebvre's *rhythmanalysis* method of social interpretation argues that measured rhythm is part of constructing everyday life in any society.[28] Regular movement produces and contests the social order. Societies presume a correct pattern to movement. Our study of early Christianity focuses on interregional travel (compared to local, intracity movement), so the limited instances of travel reflect fewer rhythmic patterns. However, we can inquire as to how Christians *normally* traveled. Did early Christians usually travel in groups or independently? The habits of mobility suggest a certain meaning.

4. Route, or direction. What path do people take? Movement does not happen in straight lines (as reductionistic maps suggest). It is channeled and redirected along designated routes. How were such channels formed and selected? Because of the opportunities and limitations of routes, connectivity (being in relationship with) overrides contiguity (being next to). People thus conceive of place relationally and socially, not spatially or topographically. What geographical and social realities channeled the movements of early Christians? What was the significance of those routes and destinations?

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[28] Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).

5. Experience, or emotions. How does travel feel? What emotions does it produce? What sentiments does immobility evoke? Corporeal movement is experienced through the physical senses and produces internal sentiments. Travel has affective dimensions. Do discourses of early Christian travel reveal a sense of envy, shame, regret, sadness, joy, love, anger, and/or honor? What emotions did travelers elicit from the people who received them at the destination—resentment, gratitude, esteem, etc.?

6. Identities, or people. Who moves? Movement is associated with distinctive "subject identities." Figures such as commuters, tourists, refugees, missionaries, or migrant workers are defined through their (im)mobilities.[29] Then, particular roles and assumptions are associated with each mobile figure. For example, compared to the subject identity of citizen, a migrant faces assumptions of being uneducated and untrustworthy. The mobile subject is constructed through representational schemes but then is embodied through individual practices that rework the conventional caricatures. How did Christians represent themselves? Who did they travel as? To what degree did their identity as "Christian" affect their movement and its interpretation? And beyond individual identity, did that person represent a particular group? How did the traveler's self-identity align with the perceptions of others? This aspect of travel is particular relevance for discerning its socio-theological meaning, so gets developed further in §2.3.

These six aspects—motive and reason, velocity and speed, rhythm and regularity, route and direction, experience and emotions, and identities and people—constitute the core aspects of mobility. The framework unpacks how mobility becomes meaningful.[30] In this way, the mobilities paradigm sensitizes us to not merely the *presence* of meaning in travel but also the *nature* of that meaning. Because of limited historical evidence, we are unable to assess all six aspects of each travel event. Nevertheless, many of these aspects can be identified and prove helpful for analyzing the social meaning of particular travel events among early Christians.

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[29] For these classes of people, see Tim Cresswell and Peter Merriman, *Geographies of Mobilities — Practices, Spaces, Subjects*, ed. Peter Merriman and Tim Cresswell (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), chs. 12–16.

[30] Cresswell, "Politics of Mobility," 22.

§2.2 The Value of Travel

Travel can be approached as an economic activity. Travelers expend resources to acquire something of value. Every person calculates the costs and benefits of a travel event differently but, in general, most travelers expect that the effort of travel will somehow improve their situation. The benefits obtained through movement should eclipse the costs incurred to move. A textbook on transport geography summarizes the transactional nature of travel events.

> Transport exists for the purpose of bridging spatial gaps, though these gaps can be expressed not only in terms of distance but also of time and cost. It is the means by which people and goods can be moved from the place where they are at the moment to another place where they will be at a greater advantage; goods can be sold at a higher price, people can get a better job, or live in the sort of house they prefer, or go for a holiday at the seaside. In short, people and goods are transported from one place where their utility is lower to another where it is higher.[31]

People move across space when the benefits of travel outweighs its costs. People travel to gain something.[32] As the ancient historian Polybius noted, "No man sails the seas just to get across them. The purpose is invariably the pleasure, honor, or profit which result" (*Histories* 3.4.10–11).[33]

An economic approach to travel does not suggest that mobile subjects are rational economic agents, as though travelers perform a detailed cost-benefit analysis for each movement.[34] People travel for non-financial reasons, such as motorists who simply drive through the countryside or passengers who travel on cruise ships at sea. However, these purportedly

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[31] Henry Patrick White and M. L. Senior, *Transport Geography* (London: Longman, 1983), 207.
[32] The related principle of "least net effort" suggests that, in general, people strive to reduce the costs and increase the benefits of moving from one place to another; cf. Cresswell and Merriman, "Geographies of Mobilities," 3.
[33] Trans. Frank W. Walbank, *A Historical Commentary on Polybius*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1957), 301–2.
[34] The "rational-mobile-person" who moved according to fixed laws was a central development of transport geography in the 1960s and 1970s but has since been modified to account for previously discounted "irrational" movements. Cf. Cresswell and Merriman, "Geographies of Mobilities," 2.

irrational movements, set within a particular narrative or ideology, deliver some perceived benefit. We might summarize the economics of travel as such: (the *benefits* gained through travel) – (the *costs* required for travel) = (the net *value* of travel). This cost-benefit approach to ancient travel provides a second methodological tool for constructing the socio-theological significance of early Christian travel. Mobility studies explain what travel means; a cost-benefit analysis unlocks the value generated through travel. To sensitize us to the economic aspects of travel events, we first assess the three principal costs of ancient travel, then examine the potential benefit of honor.

§2.2.1 The Costs of Travel

Mediterranean historian Fernand Braudel famously referred to distance as "enemy #1" of civilization.[35] The reason is that the notable costs required to bridge distances limited economic progress and social connections. Travel involves real expenses; people cannot move without paying something. To better understand the cumulative costs of ancient travel, we note the material, physical, and social costs associated with travel in the ancient world.

1. Material Costs. Travel requires money. Travelers get separated from their means of production and so must expend accumulated resources to subsist. How much did it cost to travel in the first century? We can calculate only a general range of travel expenses because (as remains true today) there are various modes and classes of travel. Many historical accounts and texts about travel recount the movement of the imperial elite. Roman emperors and their agents could requisition resources, count on civic hospitality, or tap the imperial treasury to fund their extravagant excursions.[36] Their regal journeys do not reflect the cost of everyday travel, such as that of early Christians

In the early fourth century CE, a public figure named Theophanes traveled from Egypt to Syrian Antioch.[37] During his six-month journey, he maintained a detailed record of his expenses, which offers substantial data about ancient travel costs. During the month of Pauni,

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[35] Braudel, *The Mediterranean*, 1:355.
[36] About imperial journeys, see Fergus Millar, *Emperor in the Roman World* (London: Duckworth, 1977), 28–40.
[37] John Matthews, *The Journey of Theophanes: Travel, Business, and Daily Life in the Roman East* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2006).

Theophanes expended an average of 937 denarii per day, the equivalent of 38 days of wages for an unskilled laborer per day of travel.[38] Theophanes' party traveled on horseback and in carriages, thereby reflecting a higher class of travel.

Better evidence about lower-class travel comes from papyri from second-century CE Roman Egypt.[39] At that time, hiring a donkey with a guide cost the equivalent of two days' wages for an unlearned worker.[40] Renting a camel tripled the transport costs to six days of wages. Water transport was notably more expensive. Passage upon a Nile ferry floating downriver cost 12–15 days of wages per day of travel. Since the Nile was a relatively easy and inexpensive means of water transport, the costs for passage on seagoing vessels were presumably greater. Instead of renting the means of transport, a traveler could purchase their own donkey (5-10 months of salary), camel (18–24 months of salary), or boat (20 years of salary). Or, people could walk on foot and carry their own supplies (free!). Regardless of the traveler's means of transport, each day of travel would require at least another day or two of wages for food, accommodations, and other necessities.[41] This data from Roman Egypt represents our best approximations of the cost of everyday travel as encountered by early Christians. A broad range of travel expenses must be acknowledged, as early Christians would have traveled at different levels of comfort. Nevertheless, the general figures reveal the steep financial costs faced by ancient travelers, especially those without elite connections to leech from.

ORBIS, an online geospatial network model of the Roman world, can also be used to calculate the costs of ancient journeys.[42] The resource culls information about ancient routes, geography, vehicles, river flows, sea currents, and more to simulate the costs of travel across Imperial Rome. Like Google Maps for modern drivers, the ORBIS platform allows users to

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[38] Matthews, *The Journey of Theophanes*, 97 (pp. 138–62 for detailed expenses). The daily wage for unskilled labor was 25 denarii per day, cf. Louis C. West, "The Cost of Living in Roman Egypt," *Classical Philology* 11, no. 3 (1916): 293–314.

[39] Huebner, "Travel by the Lower Classes;" the figures in this paragraph are from pp. 100–1.

[40] These figures are based on the monthly wage for unskilled laborers of 30-40 drachma per month. A Roman soldier earned three times that amount, so his cost would have been one-third the stated amounts when reckoned in terms of daily wages.

[41] Travel incurred both actual costs for transport or subsistence *plus* the opportunity costs foregone by not cultivating land or tending their business.

[42] The interactive tool is available at https://orbis.stanford.edu; Walter Scheidel, "The Shape of the Roman World: Modelling Imperial Connectivity," *JRA* 27 (2014): 7–32.

map a route between two cities and calculates the material costs in terms of time and price. The algorithm-produced results approximate the relative expenses associated with a particular travel route. The ORBIS calculations allow users to project the significant material investments behind the movement of people, letters, and resources throughout the network of early Christians.[43]

Paul's epistle to the Galatians can serve as an example of transportation costs. If a Pauline associate traveled the 614 kilometers from Antioch ad Orontes (Syria) to Iconium (Galatia), the delivery of the letter, according to ORBIS, required 17 days and 641 denarii.[44] Such travel costs far exceeded the time and cost of textualizing Paul's ideas onto the papyrus—about one day and 6.6 denarii.[45] Based on these estimates, delivering the letter of Galatians cost 17 times more time and 97 times more money than writing the letter. Paul's letter did not just appear in Galatia. Someone had to travel to Galatia, and that travel cost something. The material expenses of travel had to be both covered and justified, which required social connections and ideologies. For early Christians, certain social and theological convictions rationalized the notable expenditures for their travel.

2. Physical Costs. Travel in the ancient world was unpleasant and dangerous. Discomfort, the risk of theft and sickness, and even the prospect of death constituted real physical costs for travelers. Though not reducible to a quantifiable price, these physical costs greatly impacted ancient mobility.

Ancient travel was slow, inconvenient, and uncomfortable. Land travel involved walking 20–30 kilometers per day, either on foot or on an animal, for multiple days.[46] Elites could hire

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[43] Because historical data for prices comes through price edicts, ORBIS's model prioritizes commercial and military networks. It presents transport costs "per kilogram of wheat" and "per passenger in a carriage." Given that early Christians constituted an information network and traveled themselves (instead of outsourcing the transportation), their actual costs were likely less than ORBIS's projections. Nevertheless, the exercise of estimating travel prices prompts us to account for the costs and effort required to move ideas across geographic space.

[44] These figures are idealized averages, as ORBIS cannot provide the exact costs of a single trip of actual people because of the improvisational and unique nature of any travel event; Scheidel, "Roman World," 9.

[45] E. Randolph Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing: Secretaries, Composition and Collection* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 165–69.

[46] On the rate of ancient travel, see Ramsay, "Roads and Travel," 386–89; Casson, *Travel in the Ancient World*, 188–96; Laurence, *The Roads of Roman Italy*, 81–82.

baggage handlers, horses, and carriages to spare themselves the discomfort but for average people, travel was physically demanding. Lodging at roadside inns, rather than alleviating fatigue, often compounded the misery of travel. According to popular Roman stereotypes, innkeepers were untrustworthy and inns were dangerous. Horace speaks of "conniving innkeepers" and squalid conditions during his journey from Rome to Brundisium (*Satire* 1.5). *Acts of John* narrates how the apostle was "molested by bugs" while sleeping at a roadside inn (60). Artemidorus said that a dream about an inn or innkeeper "foretells affliction, distress, [and] dislocation," since they "resemble death" (*On.* 3.57). Such an association reveals the dreadful conditions at ancient accommodations for travelers.[47] Jewish rabbis avoided travel because they associated inns with ritual impurity and improper sexual activity.[48] Inns were, in fact, havens for prostitution, often with publicly listed prices of sex workers.[49] For these reasons, people preferred the hospitality of friends to ease the discomfort of travel.

Beyond the discomforts and unpleasantries, travel was dangerous, even life-threatening. Natural disasters and violent crime were frequent realities on the road. Paul references these dual threats, mentioning "danger from rivers, danger from bandits" (2 Cor 11:26; κινδύνοις ποταμῶν, κινδύνοις λῃστῶν). To mitigate the risks caused by inclement weather, the ancients ceased sea travel between November 10 and March 10 (Vegetius, *Epitoma rei militaris*, 4.39). Sailors harbored in the winter months (cf. Acts 27:12; 1 Cor 16:6; 2 Tim 4:21; Tit 3:12; Philo, *Embassy* 15), though some travelers calculated the costs and braved the risks of winter travel (Acts 28:11; Philo, *Embassy*, 190). Yet, even in July, Cicero faced choppy water and poor visibility in the Aegean (*Ad Atticum* 5:12.1), and so waited on Delos to ameliorate risks. The unpredictable forces of nature threatened travelers and commanded their respect. Another natural threat afflicted travelers—wild animals. For example, in *The Golden Ass*, Apuleius mentions bears, boars, and "hordes of gigantic wolves" that blocked roads and mauled travelers (8.15).

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[47] Artemidorus also equates the misery of travel with that of prison; cf. 2.33.4; 2.41.1; 3.22.1.
[48] Hezser, *Jewish Travel in Antiquity*, 101.
[49] *Acts of Thomas* 51; Thomas McGinn, *The Economy of Prostitution in the Roman World: A Study of Social History and the Brothel* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 15–22.

Ancient travelers often encountered bandits, professional robbers who attacked and plundered people along roads. [50] Gregory Thaumaturgus, a third-century church leader, spoke of his upcoming journey home from Palestine to Pontus in dreadful terms: "Probably even as I travel I shall encounter thieves and be captured, and having been stripped naked be wounded with many blows, and lie somewhere half-dead."[51] The ancient physician Celsus said that the dangers of travel equaled those of combatant sports and warfare. Medical students could learn about human viscera from the "gladiator in the arena, or a soldier in battle, or a traveller who has been set upon by robbers" (*On Medicine*, Prooemium, line 43). Apuleius' novel *The Golden Ass* reads as an odyssey of ancient banditry, with frequent scenes of highway robbery. When a traveler wants to set out before daybreak, the doorman at the inn gate rhetorically askes, "Don't you know that the roads are infested with robbers?" (1:15). Some brigands would hold up travelers and rob them of all their money (1.7); other bandits left "corpses of murdered people lying in various places on the public highways" (2.18). One comedic scene reveals the great anxieties people experienced because of bandits—a group of travelers clashes with local villagers because each side has mistaken the other for bandits on the prowl (8.17–18). Bandits could also easily capture and enslave travelers. Suetonius describes the chaos of the civil wars during the Second Triumvirate—"Gangs of robbers openly went about with swords by their sides, ostensibly to protect themselves, but travelers in the country, freemen and slaves alike, were seized and kept in confinement in the *ergastula* [prisons for slaves who worked in chains] of the land owners" (*Aug. 32*, LCL). Widespread banditry complicated travel and inflated it physical costs. During any journey, travelers could be robbed, enslaved, or even killed.

Ancient travel was rarely a leisure activity or source of pleasure. Physical discomforts, natural risks, and banditry exacted a steep cost from ancient travelers. Travelers took precautionary measures to mitigate the risks.[52] But once outside their primary social network, they lacked protection and faced significant threats.

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[50] Brent D. Shaw, "Bandits in the Roman Empire," *Past & Present*, no. 105 (1984): 10; Ramsay, *Church in the Roman Empire*, 23–24 notes various such inscriptions from the Pisidia that disclose the danger and violence encountered on the road.

[51] *Address of Thanksgiving to Origen* 16 (199) (trans. Slusser).

[52] Lincoln Blumell, "Beware of Bandits! Banditry and Land Travel in the Roman Empire," *Journeys* 8, no. 1–2 (2007): 9–12 classifies the main pre-emptive measures that ancient travelers adopted: travel in groups, act poor, carry weapons, and seek divine help.

3. Social Costs. The diminishment of one's social standing represented another cost of travel. Ancient Romans privileged sedentary occupations and marginalized mobile people as aberrant and dangerous. Cicero denounced the mobile traders as "vulgar" and "greatly disparaged," whereas, to him, cultivating a country estate "seems to deserve the highest respect" (*On Duties* 1.151).[53] Throughout Greek literature, "wandering is synonymous with dislocation, ignorance, and dispossession."[54] Wanderers garnered suspicion because their physical movement transgressed cultural boundaries and threatened social cohesiveness.[55] Status and rank could not be easily transposed across space, so the traveler often forfeited their social capital and became, in effect, a "nobody."[56] Because of their marginal status, people on the road were often preyed on. In *The Golden Ass*, Lucius' host warns him, "Your conspicuous status, together with the lack of respect for a stranger travelling abroad, may cause [the bandits] to lie in wait for you" (2.18). The negative social identity attached to travel compounded the material and physical costs of travel.[57]

To develop a cost-benefit model for ancient travel, we have noted three types of expenses of ancient travel—material costs (i.e., time and money), physical costs (i.e., discomfort, harm, and risk to life), and social costs (i.e., loss of status and derision). The tremendous costs paid by travelers in the ancient world raise questions about the outputs. What benefits could people expect to obtain from travel? What value did they gain?

§2.2.2 The Benefit of Honor

[53] Josephus also elevates agriculture over trade to positively characterize his fellow Judeans (Ag. Ap., 1.60–61). M. I. Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 116–122 argues that ancients viewed land ownership in moral and political terms, so they sought the social position associated with land rather than a certain rate of financial return.
[54] Silvia Montiglio, *Wandering in Ancient Greek Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 263. The author traces the ambivalent meanings attributed to ancient wanderers, both as deranged outcasts and as pious learners.
[55] Luckritz Marquis, *Transient Apostle*, 9.
[56] Julian Pitt-Rivers, "The Law of Hospitality," in *The Fate of Shechem or the Politics of Sex: Essays in the Anthropology of the Mediterranean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 94–112.
[57] Even when travelers were treated well, they faced social costs; hospitality from acquaintances created a measure of relational indebtedness.

Most travel in antiquity was *in*voluntary migration. Political pressures or economic hardships compelled people to move in order to survive.[58] Our analysis throughout, however, focuses on voluntary travel, instances when early Christians choose to move for ideological and personal reasons, not due to necessity. In the Roman Imperial period, most voluntary was driven by military or commercial interests.[59] Ancient travel was, by and large, linked to power or wealth. These two benefits propelled many a soldier and traveler to endure the steep costs of travel. Yet, the rewards of political clout and economic gain were not the only factors propelling ancient people to travel, especially for voluntary associations such as the early Christian movement.[60] Another factor proves relevant in early Christian instances of travel and so deserves special attention—namely, social honor.[61] This section explores, first, the influential role of honor in the ancient world, then a modern economic theory of honor. From these points, we reach conclusions regarding the way in which honor was a valuable commodity in the social economy of ancient travel.

A pivotal value throughout Mediterranean history and culture was honor. It is generally defined as "the public acknowledgement of one's worth to the group."[62] Recognition and fame animated Greek and Roman societies.[63] Aristotle referred to honor as the chief concern of noble men and the greatest good which can be awarded to people (*Eth. Nic.* 4.3). Classicist Carlin Barton traces how honor (and the avoidance of dishonor) motivated Romans'

[58] Ligt and Tacoma, *Migration and Mobility in the Early Roman Empire*, 9–12.
[59] Cioffi, "Travel in the Roman World," 9–10.
[60] For motives in ancient religious travel, see Harland, "Pausing at the Intersection of Religion and Travel" and §0.2 above.
[61] People who identified as Christ-followers did travel as political leaders and merchants. However, this investigation focuses on *Christian* travel, not the travel *of Christians*. And in those instances when people traveled *as Christians* for particularly *Christian* reasons, commerce and warfare were not the principal factors. We cannot entirely detach financial and political considerations from the socio-theological aspects of travel, as the factors might be layered.
[62] Julian, Pitt-Rivers, "Honor," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York: The Macmillan Company & The Free Press, 1968).
[63] For NT scholarship attending to the social-moral influence of honor in ancient texts, see David A. deSilva, *Despising Shame: Honor Discourse and Community Maintenance in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, rev. ed. (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008); Te-Li Lau, *Defending Shame: Its Formative Power in Paul's Letters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020).

behavior. The quest for status, represented through symbolic offices, crowns, statues, and panegyrics, lit a fire in their bones.[64]

Epideictic speeches appealed to praise and blame to influence listeners. In one revealing example (*Oration 31*), Dio Chrysostom (c. 40–112 CE) blatantly appeals to honor and shame to motivate his audience toward certain behavior. The people of Rhodes had long honored benefactors by erecting public statues with inscriptions, as per Greek civic traditions. However, recent misers began to erase the old name on a statue and etch in the new honoree's name. Dio's sharp rebuke sheds light on the primacy of honor in ancient society. To gain the Rhodians' attention, Dio first discusses how such actions had tarnished their reputation. "[T]he state [of Rhodes] as such is *in evil repute* on that account, and that you yourselves, one and all, though you bear a *good reputation* in everything else, in this one matter do not enjoy the *general esteem*" (31.2, LCL, emphasis added). Their failure to honor and remember benefactors was an act of impiety and injustice, a violation of the highest Greek values, and thus a basis for contempt. Dio supposes that public derision would motivate the Rhodians to confer and preserve proper honors, regardless of the construction expenses.

By annulling the honors and erasing the memory of past benefactors, the Rhodians debased the honor of noble people and threatened society. The failure to confer honors could undercut the motive that drove people to perform benevolent and sacrificial acts. Dio cites examples of people propelled by honor. "Many [warriors] in times past have even given up their lives just in order that they might get a statue and have their name announced by the herald or receive some other honour and leave to succeeding generations a fair name and remembrance of themselves" (31.16). Likewise, athletes trained and competed in distant games in order to obtain honorific rewards (31.21). The potential benefit of honor compelled people to endure great costs. Admiration from other people, he states, "incites every man to despise danger, to endure toils, and to scorn the life of pleasure and ease" (31.17). The social calculus, wherein people could gain honor through their deeds, stimulated ancient people to undertake expensive and risky endeavors, such as travel.

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[64] Carlin A. Barton, *Roman Honor: The Fire in the Bones* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001); regarding honor in Roman politics, see J. E Lendon, *Empire of Honour: The Art of Government in the Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

Social honor was not a mere primitive instinct but a calculated benefit that a rational agent could seek. In *Economy of Esteem* (2004), economist Geoffrey Brennan and philosopher Philip Pettit present a coherent economic theory of honor (or "esteem").[65] They note how humans constantly seek and grant positive evaluations from and to others. Esteem becomes a "commodity" or "economic benefit" that people pursue, trade, and accumulate. Such a framework results in a patterned economy for the exchange of honor. This helps us understand the value of ancient travel; social honor was a potential benefit that people could seek to gain through physical movement.

People desire for others to think well of them, so we expend resources to shape perceptions of ourselves. People's inevitable desire for honor produces an "economy of esteem," the aggregate patterns and systems for allocating the asset of social approval. This system allows people to rationally and effectively target and demand esteem.[66] People expend resources to secure the social commodity. Suppliers promise the payment of esteem to induce a desired performance, creating a *quid pro quo* exchange of resources.[67] "Thus people are rationally bound to compete in both the pursuit and the exchange of esteem, thereby generating aggregate effects [i.e., economies] that feedback on their own choices."[68] The quest for status shapes social behavior in regular, structured ways.

Because honor is an evaluative good from others, it can be experienced only with groups. The economy of esteem possesses centripetal forces that "encourage individuals to band together in associations and groups for the sake of esteem."[69] People acquire esteem through groups in two ways: participating in the collective and gaining an audience of esteem-providers. The pursuit of honor propels people toward other people. Although Brennan and Pettit focus on modern communities, their model sheds light on the "economic transactions" inherent in ancient travel and on the value that such travelers expected to derive. Without digital technologies, ancients could form group associations and become known by other

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[65] Geoffrey Brennan and Philip Pettit, *The Economy of Esteem* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). The following summarizes their "Part I: Towards the Economics of Esteem" (pp. 11–78), as part two develops technical economic modeling.
[66] Brennan and Pettit, *The Economy of Esteem*, 48.
[67] Brennan and Pettit, *The Economy of Esteem*, 50.
[68] Brennan and Pettit, *The Economy of Esteem*, 76.
[69] Brennan and Pettit, *The Economy of Esteem*, 220.

only through physical mobility. Within an economy of esteem, travel can be viewed as a rational and profitable social performance for acquiring honor.[70] Travel was a physical means by which people participated in communities and gained an audience. This socio-economy system allowed ancient travelers to convert the notable costs of mobility into such a desired commodity. The connectivity and status produced through travel, in their minds, outweighed the cumulative costs. As will become evident in subsequent chapters, the honor that early Christian travelers experienced within their community was Christological and had divine origins, so was a theological reality.

This section has identified the costs (i.e., material, physical, and social) and potential benefit of honor involved in ancient travel. Consideration of these inputs and outputs helps to reveal the value and function of travel. The analysis of travel among early Christians in Chapters 3–8 pays particular attention to these dynamics to discern the contextual meaning of particular travel events in the communities of Paul and Ignatius.

§2.3 The Identity of Travelers and Hosts

Travel produces social identities, a person's sense of self in relation to others.[71] When travelers move from their native territory, they assume the social role of "guest" or "foreigner." Travelers are outside of their primary social context. Therefore, they require hospitality from others to subsist during the liminal period.[72] On the recipient end of the relationship, the sedentary person to whom the guest moves becomes a "host" when an outsider enters their physical space. For both the outside guest and the inside host, movement

[70] John S. Kloppenborg, *Christ's Associations: Connecting and Belonging in the Ancient City* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2019) likewise explores the ways membership in ancient associations offered people connectivity and status but does not discuss the role of travel in this regard.
[71] The concept of social identity is defined as a person's sense of self in relation to others, their self-concept derived from the social group; cf. Henri Tajfel, "Social Identity and Intergroup Behaviour," *Social Science Information* 13, no. 2 (1974): 65–93; Henri Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories: Studies in Social Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
[72] Steven Muir, "Religion on the Road in Ancient Greece and Rome," in *Travel and Religion in Antiquity*, ed. Philip A. Harland (Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2011), 29–48, here 30–31.

leads to new social roles and patterns.[73] To understand the meaning of travel, we must attend to these relational dynamics and social identities produced through ancient travel.

§2.3.1 The Traveler as Dislocated ξένος

The substantival adjective ξένος is generically glossed "stranger," "foreigner" or "guest." What constituted the essence of a ξένος? Bruce Malina emphasizes the unknown and foreign nature of a ξένος. "In the world of the Bible," Malina claims," hospitality is *never* about entertaining family and friends. Hospitality *always* is about dealing with strangers."[74] In ancient literature, a guest's foreignness and anonymity were topoi in discourses about ξενία.[75] This literary trope highlighted a host's noble and unconditioned generosity.[76] However, we must distinguish between idealized literary tropes and actual social practices. For most of life, people host real people, not mysterious figures or disguised gods. In collectivistic contexts, both ancient and modern, hospitality occurred foremost between known parties. Moreover, the practice of ξενία, like its Latin equivalent *hospitium*, involved more than a one-off domestic encounter but implied a reciprocal relationship with ongoing obligations. A ξένος was a "guest-friend,"[77] or according to the late-antique lexicographer, Hesychius of Alexandria, ξένος meant "the friend from abroad" (ὁ ἀπὸ ξένης φίλος).[78]

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[73] Travel also constructed an "ethnic/cultural" identity for the guest and host by introducing a sense of "otherness." Cf. Romm, "Travel"; Tim Whitmarsh, *Narrative and Identity in the Ancient Greek Novel: Returning Romance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Catherine Hezser, "Strangers on the Road: Otherness, Identification and Disguise in Rabbinic Travel Tales of Late Roman Palestine," in *Journeys in the Roman East: Imagined and Real*, ed. Maren Niehoff (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 239–53.

[74] Bruce J. Malina, "Hospitality," in *Biblical Social Values and Their Meaning: A Handbook*, ed. John J. Pilch and Bruce J. Malina (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 104, italics added. For a similar approach to ancient hospitality, see also Jipp, *Hospitality to Strangers in Luke-Acts*, 53–57.

[75] Steve Reece, *The Stranger's Welcome: Oral Theory and the Aesthetics of the Homeric Hospitality Scene* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1993).

[76] The anonymous guest motif appears in Homer's *Odyssey* (1.123–23; 3.69–74; 4.60–62; 7.226–39; 14.45–47; 16. 54–59), Jesus's parable of the sheep and goats (Matt 25:31–46, "And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you?" v. 38), and historical narratives (Acts 28:1–10; Dio Chrysostom, *Oration 7*).

[77] LSJ, s.v. ξένος: "I. guest-friend, applied to persons and states bound by a treaty or tie of hospitality. . . 2. of parties giving or receiving hospitality." See also, Gabriel Herman, *Ritualised Friendship and the Greek City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

[78] Hesychius, s.v. ξεῖνος.

Thus, Malina's conception of ancient hospitality overemphasizes the foreign identity of ξένοι as their constitutive component.

Instead of "anonymity," the concept of "dislocation," a social reality grounded in physical separation, better defines ξένος. The concepts of ξένος and ξενία involved physical mobility, movement from one place to another. Such "places" are not simply geographical points in space but socio-economic networks that provided identity and protection. Physical dislocation involved social dislocation from one's primary community.[79] The Greek verb to travel, ἀποδημέω, defined travel as leaving home, a departure from one's community (δῆμος).[80] The bodily separation makes one's social identity precarious. Travelers relinquished their social ties along with the accompanying status and resources derived from that community.[81] They could no longer access their social networks of local reciprocity and friendship. Travelers were, in essence, "physically and socially dislocated individuals," which made them ξένοι. Because of their socio-physical dislocation, travelers required acceptance into a new social network in a different locale for protection and provision.[82]

Ancient references to ξένοι note their physical mobility and social dislocation. For example, Cyclops asks Odysseus, "Strangers [ξένοι], who are you? What land did you sail from, over the watery paths? Are you bound on some trading errand, or are you random adventurers, roving the seas as pirates do?" (*Ody.* 9:252–55).[83] The ξένοι appear as wanderers whom Cyclops tries to locate socially. In Job 31:32 (LXX), the protagonist states that he extended hospitality those who arrived at his house: "A ξένος did not spend the night outside; my door has been opened to all who come" (my translation). Early Christian references to ξένοι reveal the social dislocation and vulnerability embedded in the term. When admonishing Christians to love certain social groups, authors group ξένοι with other classes of vulnerable people. For example, Justin Martyr explains that funds collected at church were for "assist[ing] orphans

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[79] Muir, "Paul and the Perils of Travel," 30.
[80] Montiglio, *Wandering in Ancient Greek Culture*, 2; LSJ s.v., "to be away from home, be abroad or be on one's travels."
[81] In the metaphorical language of Eph 2:19, ξένοι get contrasted with συμπολῖται ("fellow citizen"), people marked by belonging to and connection with a polis-like community.
[82] Laurence, *The Roads of Roman Italy*, 178; John Nicols, "The Rituals of Hospitium: The Tesserae Hospitales," in *Ancient Documents and Their Contexts*, ed. John Bodel and Nora Dimitrova (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 194.
[83] Translation from W. H. D. Rouse, *Homer: The Odyssey* (New York: The New American Library, 1952).

and widows and those who are in need because of illness or some other cause, and those who are in chains, and the ξένοι who are staying with us." The collections were for "all in general who are in need" (1 *Apol.* 67:6b–7; cf. Heb 13:1–3; Herm. Mand. 8.10 [38.10]; Herm. Sim. 9.27.2 [104.2]; Cyprian, *Ep.* 35).[84] In this context, ξένοι refers to traveling Christians, perhaps itinerant teachers, who needed protection like other socially vulnerable classes, such as orphans, widows, and the sick.

In conclusion, ξένοι were dislocated individuals whose travel created social vulnerability. The provision of hospitality, ξενία, was a ritual act that re-integrated the socio-physically dislocated traveler into a social network.[85] Because travelers relied upon hosts for subsistence, the act of hospitality comprised an essential aspect of ancient travel.

§2.3.2 Hospitality and the Social Identity of Hosts

Movement also shapes the social identity of the person who receives the guests. Someone cannot function as a "host" unless an outsider moves into their socio-physical context. The travel of another person constructs the social identity of a "host." Ancients had a similar yet nuanced view of the social function of hospitality. For them, a person's response to a guest revealed their character. Extending assistance and protection to a vulnerable ξένος exposed the guest's genuine character, one's true self. Upon the arrival of a guest, the host could be malevolent or benevolent, hostile or hospitable. They possessed the option and ability to reject, or even dominate, the socially-dislocated traveler.[86] So, the manner in which the ξένος was received depended upon, and thus revealed, the character, piety, honor, and, ultimately, social identity of the host. Scenes in Homer's *Odyssey* illustrate the role of hosts developed through travel. Homeric literature, although it originated in the eight century BCE, can,

[84] Translation from Denis Minns and Paul Parvis, eds., *Justin, Philosopher and Martyr: Apologies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
[85] Nicols, "The Rituals of Hospitium: The Tesserae Hospitales," 192 notes that Latin sources refer to *hospitium* as social connections established between different communities. The two parties were "of roughly equal social status, and . . . each should be capable of offering similar services to the other." Latin *hospitium* was a reciprocal relationship predicated on distance, not foreignness, as the two parties clearly knew other.
[86] Pitt-Rivers, "The Law of Hospitality," 99.

nevertheless, help frame early Christian literature, for it enjoyed a broad and pervasive presence in Roman-era culture.[87]

On several occasions in the *Odyssey*, the hero Odysseus entered a new community as a ξένος to discern the character of the local residents. Making a trial of people to test their loyalties is a "well-established compositional theme in the *Odyssey.*"[88] When his ship arrives at the island of Cyclops, Odysseus disembarks and tells his co-passengers, "I myself with my own ship's crew will go and find out (πειρήσομαι) what manner of men live yonder. Are they barbarous, arrogant and lawless? Are they hospitable and godfearing (οὐδὲ δίκαιοι ἦε φιλόξεινοι)?" (9.174–76). Odysseus' arrival exposes whether the residents are righteous and reverent by testing their hospitality. The Greek πειρη– root indicates Odysseus' attempt to "examine" or "try out" his host.[89]

The climactic scene of Odysseus' arrival home after a long absence (17.330–500) allows us to analyze the nuances and assumptions of hospitality dynamics. The hero Odysseus reappears as someone unworthy of hospitality, looking like "an old, wretched beggar." The alleged "hosts"—who were ironically feasting on Odysseus' food in his house—convene to evaluate this unrecognizable "guest" and decide whether they would welcome him. From the narrator's point of view, the hosts' discussion about Odysseus actually reveals their own identity and character, particularly the group leader, Antinous. The god Athene urges Odysseus to ask the suitors for alms and thus "learn which [are] righteous and which unrighteous" (17.363). Antinous dismisses Odysseus as a "loathsome beggar," unworthy to join the collective feast. Antinous' refusal to extend hospitality, though intended as an assertion of authority, becomes a self-shaming declaration. Eumaeus the swineherd reveals the narrator's point: "High-born you may be, Antinous, but the words you speak do you no

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[87] On the popularity and influence of Homer in antiquity, see Susan Stephens, "Who Read Ancient Novels?," in *The Search for the Ancient Novel*, ed. James Tatum (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1994), 405–18; Ronald Hock, "Homer in Greco-Roman Education," in *Mimesis and Intertextuality in Antiquity and Christianity*, ed. Dennis R. MacDonald (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001), 56–77; Joseph Farrell, "Roman Homer," in *The Cambridge Companion to Homer*, ed. Robert Fowler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 254–71.

[88] Agathe Thorton, "Testing," in *People and Themes in Homer's Odyssey* (London: Routledge, 1970), 47–51 (here 50); the author concludes that the theme of testing was quite probably an ancient social institution.

[89] Carol Dougherty, *Travel and Home in Homer's Odyssey and Contemporary Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 5–7.

honour." Odysseus' arrival before the suitors has exposed their true character and loyalty. Odysseus then challenges Antinous. If Antinous were truly "the noblest—a kinglike man," he would give Odysseus more than the rest and thus evoke a return of endless praise. Odysseus frames hospitality as an honor-challenge wherein Antinous could display his noble status by giving. The invitation suggests the negative corollary—an ignoble figure would not aid the guest and thus assume a disgraceful reputation. Then, in an act of great insult against Odysseus and the gods of hospitality, Antinous strikes Odysseus with a stool, an instrument for feasting and hosting. A spectator states divine implications: "Antinous, it was an ugly thing to assault this unhappy beggar so. . . . [Gods] assume this shape and that, wander about our towns and observe both outrage and righteous dealing among mankind" (17:483–88). This comment closes the case regarding Antinous true identity and character. In the end, as Odysseus strings the bow and kills Antinous, the proper social order is restored as roles are reapportioned based on true identities. The inhospitable are vanquished and the gods restore Odysseus as the sovereign host within his home.

Throughout Odysseus' journey home, travel evokes hospitality, and hospitality encounters reveal two critical virtues (or lack thereof) in the host: honor and piety. These pivotal social values were central elements of ancient hospitality that are worth noting. The arrival of guests generated an opportunity to acquire status. Guests were honorific.[90] A host's public, unconditioned generosity was a means to honor. In his analysis of ξενία among Greek elites, Herman observes that for ancient Greeks, "the possession of *xenoi* was not only a status symbol but also chiefly an asset of real value. The worth and power of a man both within his community and outside it was in a sense in direction proportion to the number of *xenoi* attached to him."[91] A person's status increased as people traveled to him. Despite the material costs, hospitality was an opportunity to gain social assets by forming and enhancing social relations. Within this socio-economic matrix, people generally sought to host, or "acquire," guests through acts of hospitality, regardless of financial expenses.

The act of hospitality also carried a sacred status. Because hospitality was not economically incentivized or legislated through civic law, the gods were evoked to enforce guest-host

[90] Pitt-Rivers, "The Law of Hospitality," 105.
[91] Herman, *Ritualised Friendship*, 36.

relations. Hospitality was a quasi-religious activity that expressed one's piety. Odysseus explained sacred hospitality to Cyclops:

> "We have reached your presence, have come to your knees in supplication, to receive, we hope, your friendly favour, to receive perhaps some such present as custom expects from host to guest. Sir, I beg you to reverence the gods. We are suppliants, and Zeus himself is the champion of suppliants and of guests; 'god of guests' is the name of his; guests are august, and Zeus goes with them" (9:269–71; cf. 6.207–208; 7.159–166; 7.181–182).

Ancient Greek traditions invoked the divine in travel accounts to compel hospitality towards the vulnerable travel. Receiving guests was a sacred practice because it elicited a divine response. People throughout antiquity interpreted hospitality as piety toward the gods.[92] As Philo of Alexandria stated, "Abraham's hospitality ... was but a by-product of a greater virtue. That virtue is piety" (*On Abraham* 114, LCL). The practices of hospitality parallel ritual sacrifices to the gods, who were present as enforcers of guest-host relationships. The arrival of a guest, akin to the installation of a divine image inside the *naos*, consecrates the space, the food presented, the participants, and the exchange. To receive a guest—a representative of the gods—was an honorable expression of piety toward the gods themselves. Like all peoples negotiating travel in the ancient world, Christians likewise associated travel with sacred and religious dimensions, as Chs. 3–8 explore.

This section regarding the identity of travelers and hosts has examined the social custom of hospitality toward socio-physically dislocated ξένοι as a demonstration of genuine character, especially one's honor and piety. Travel generates the social roles of "guest" and "host" which are performed through ritualized hospitality, which affirms and reinforces social ties. Travel performs and creates social meaning(s) by invoking the calculus of hospitality relations. For each of the travel events discussed in Chs. 3–8, acts of hospitality play a critical role in the meaning of travel and assume theological significance.

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[92] E.g., *Odyssey* 3.52–53; 6.119–121; 13.200–202; Gen 18:1–16; 19:1–11; Wis 19:13–18. In early Christianity literature, Matt 10:11–15; Rom 12:13; 1 Pet 4:9; Heb 13:2; *1 Clem* 1.2; 10.1–12.8. For hospitality in the NT, especially Acts, see Jipp, *Hospitality to Strangers in Luke-Acts*; Andrew Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels: Early Christian Hospitality in Its Mediterranean Setting* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2005).

§2.4 Conclusions

This chapter has developed a tripartite critical model to interpret travel. Methodological resources from mobility studies, transport economics, and social identity help to reveal how physical movement encodes and expresses ideology. This hermeneutical approach to travel proves useful for our analysis early Christian travel in four ways.

One, the model reaches toward the first principles of travel's social significance. Such awareness of how to interpret travel from a first-principles perspective has not been consciously articulated in previous analyses of early Christian travel. If travel is a social act embedded with layers of contextual meaning(s), the tripartite approach allows us interpreters to expose some of the foundational elements containing the significance of a non-discursive, physical movement. Notions of meaning, value, and identity prompt open-ended, non-leading questions about the fundamental elements of travel. These conceptual resources sharpen our focus on the subject, but without constraining our line of vision. The broad model provides general points of entry for analyzing any travel, and thus is suitable for our specific topic of travel among early Christians.

Two, this hermeneutical model provides a pathway for interpreting any travel event and its constituent elements. This avoids the earlier tendency to homogenize the abundance of early Christian movements into a generic notion of "travel." Each travel event, regardless of its specific nuances, can be analyzed for its critical elements.

Three, this hermeneutical method offers a novel approach to interpreting travel. The theories of mobility studies and cost-benefit analysis (along with some of the social institutions presented in subsequent chapters) have not been applied to the study of early Christian travel. The new lenses have the potential to generate fresh contributions to the topic.

Four, all three aspects of our approach prove important in early Christian discourse on travel. Elements of meaning (e.g., motive, velocity, rhythm, route, experience, and identity), value (e.g., costs and the benefit of honor), and social identity (e.g., dislocated guest, host) relate to the travel events analyzed in subsequent chapters. For these reasons, the hermeneutical approach to travel presented here offers a fresh pathway for interpreting the latent historical

dynamics, social significance, and theological meaning of travel among early Christians, particularly in the communities of Paul and Ignatius.

PART II: Travel among Pauline Communities

Chapter 3: Paul's Travel Into Galatia

Paul's letter to the Galatians provides an early window into the nature and meaning of early Christian travel. The apostle had personally visited Galatia, then his subsequent letter comments on that initial encounter. Paul's journey into Galatia raises several travel-related questions. Why did Paul visit Galatia? How did he understand his travel and its impact? What was the theological significance of the travel event? To address these questions, this chapter analyzes: the social and historical context of Paul's initial journey to explain how he arrived there (§3.1), Paul's representation of travel in Gal 4:12–20 (§3.2), and the theological significance of Paul's journey and the Galatians' response in light of the letter's overall argument (§3.3).

§3.1 Paul's Social Connectivity Into Galatia

Why did Paul go to Galatia?[1] Considering the extensive territories of the Roman Empire and the geographic spread of Jewish communities in Diaspora, a figure like Paul might have traveled to just about any region from Mesopotamia to Spain. So why did he go, of all places, to the central plateau of Asia Minor?

In Gal 4:13, Paul links a health condition with his arrival in Galatia—"You know that it was δι' ἀσθένειαν τῆς σαρκός that I first announced the gospel to you." Scholars have discussed

[1] This essay favors and builds upon the south Galatian hypothesis regarding the geography of Paul's audience—that is, the letter of Galatians was addressed to the Lycaonian cities in the southern portion of the provnice of Galatia, which he visited in Acts 13–14, not to cities further north such as Ancyra. For discussion and support, see Ramsay, *Church in the Roman Empire*, 97–110; Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 3–18; Stephen Mitchell, *Anatolia: Land, Men, and Gods in Asia Minor, Vol. II: The Rise of the Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 3–5; Cilliers Breytenbach and Christiane Zimmermann, *Early Christianity in Lycaonia and Adjacent Areas: From Paul to Amphilochius of Iconium* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 60–126. Key arguments for the south Galatia hypothesis include: (1) independent sources describe Paul working in south Galatia (Acts 13–14; 2 Tim 3:11; Acts Paul 1), but never in the northern area around Ancyra and Pessinus, (2) the primary lines of communication from Cilicia to Asia across the Anatolian plateau ran through south Galatia, (3) Paul typically uses imperial nomenclature, so Galatia likely referred to the broader provincial area, not the northern ethnic region, (4) Paul's letter mentions Barnabas, who was known to the south Galatians (Gal 2:1–13), but who never visited the north, (5) historical data about north Galatia indicates the region was limited in terms of Greek language, Roman influence, and Christian conversion, and (6) inscriptional evidence reveals Paul's enduring impact around Lycaonia.

the exact nature of Paul's physical ailment and how this led him to Galatia.[2] However, Paul does not say how or why his illness became the reason for his mission to Galatia,[3] and no proposed theory regarding Paul's physical infirmity explains how the illness propelled him from Syria to Galatia.[4] Paul's reference to an illness seems to express the occasion, not cause, of his city-to-city movements within Galatia.[5] Paul first evangelized them *while having* an illness, not *because of* an illness. In the following verse, the fact of Paul's illness during his stay with the Galatians becomes central to his rhetoric. Plus, the Galatians would have more easily known that (οἴδατε δὲ ὅτι) Paul came to them *while* physically impaired (discernible to all through personal observation) rather than *because* of some illness (a decision made weeks, perhaps months, before their encounter, so far less apparent). According to Gal 4:13, Paul announced the gospel to the Galatians while having an illness. His ἀσθένεια could not have served as the reason for visiting Galatia.

In another theory for why Paul went to Galatia, Taylor builds upon "a good principle in military strategy to assure the lines of communication between the base and the front."[6] Paul entered southern Galatia to open lines of communication from Syria into Asia, an initial step in his "plan for the systematic conversion of the Roman empire."[7] As discussed in §1.1–2, such an explanation overplays the importance of premediated strategy and political ambition in early Christian travel (let alone the importance of Lycaonia and Pisidia!). In the case of Paul's travel to Galatia, he waited over a decade to enter the region from nearby Cilicia or Syria and then did so in an unreasonably circuitous route via Cyprus then Pamphylia. The

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[2] A. Andrew Das, *Galatians* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing, 2014), 455–62 summarizes the options.

[3] Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 224.

[4] Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveler*, 94–97 identifies Paul's malady as malaria; he contracted the illness in Pamphylia, then traveled inland for reprieve. This argument from silence has three problems: malaria is not prevalent in Pamphylia, it seems improbable that Paul would travel so far north for cool temperatures when other mountain ranges were closer, and Paul's comments suggest that the illness had a repulsive physical manifestation.

[5] LSJ, s.v. διά, B.III.2, "of things, to express the Cause, Occasion, or Purpose" Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, WBC (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1990), 190 notes that the διά plus accusative ἀσθένειαν "expresses the occasion," not the means of limiting condition.

[6] Taylor, "Roman Empire," 1227–28.

[7] Taylor, "Roman Empire," 1228.

delayed timing and indirect route of Paul's entrance into Galatia suggest the region was surely not visited as part of his "campaign for the conversion of the empire."[8]

A better explanation for how Paul ended up in Galatia relates to the social nature of ancient travel methods and conceptions of geography. Peoples of antiquity perceived space, terrain, and geography differently than modern peoples do. In short, Greco-Roman travelers oriented themselves around communities and peoples, not roads or directions. Although peoples in antiquity traveled widely, they did not record their geographic knowledge with maps that spatially represented places and routes.[9] Rather, they maintained documents listing the names of successive locations and communities. For maritime navigation, Greek merchants developed the περίπλους, a list of coastal sites arranged in the order of a maritime journey along a coastline.[10] Romans developed a similar technique for charting hinterland regions and land routes, as this suited their military and administrative interests. Roman *itineraria* (e.g., *Antonine Itinerary*, *Bordeaux Itinerary*, Vicerallo Cups) supplied travelers with cataloged information about human settlements along the primary routes.[11] The list of place names provided soldiers, merchants, pilgrims, and other mobile figures with the sequence of stations and towns and their intervening distances. Without a topographical or cartological perception of the physical terrain, people understood travel as physical movement through a network of successively linked communities. Ancient travel involved movement through successive communities based on social ties. Harden and Purcell noted the importance of social connectivity in pre-modern travel: "The main hindrance to the movements of people and goods by land has usually been social rather than physical."[12] As a result, travelers went

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[8] Taylor, "Roman Empire," 1228.

[9] Daniela Dueck, *Geography in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 99–102. Thanks to cartological advancements from the Age of Discovery, modern travel is experienced as a maze on paper. People can have in mind an aerial view of the entire terrain as they move. In contrast, ancient travel was analogous to solving a corn maze from the inside, a series of contingent forks that steered movements along uncertain paths.

[10] Dueck, *Geography in Classical Antiquity*, 6.

[11] Kai Brodersen, "The Presentation of Geographical Knowledge for Travel and Transport in the Roman World," in *Travel and Geography in the Roman Empire*, ed. Colin Adams and Ray Laurence (New York: Routledge, 2001), 7–21; Benet Salway, "Travel, Itineraria and Tabellaria," in *Travel and Geography in the Roman Empire*, ed. Colin Adams and Ray Laurence (New York: Routledge, 2001), 22–66; Benet Salway, "Putting the World in Order: Mapping in Roman Texts," in *Ancient Perspectives: Maps and Their Place in Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, and Rome*, ed. Richard J. A. Talbert (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 193–234.

[12] Horden and Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea*, 132.

where people (preferably acquaintances) were located,[13] even if the route was longer.[14] Links to communities influenced the direction and nature of travel. Travelers considered social possibilities rather than physical distance or efficiency.[15] Travel was a function of social connectivity.

This social nature of ancient travel explains aspects of Paul's earliest travel events, as depicted in Gal 1–2 and Acts 9–20.[16] Paul's first movements outside Jerusalem were eastward (Gal 1:17–18; cf. Acts 9:19–25; 26:17–20; 2 Cor 11:32–22), as Palestinian Jews maintained links with fellow Jews in the eastern Diaspora.[17] Next, he settled in Jerusalem, where Barnabas had introduced him to the apostles. When opposition arose, Paul moved to Tarsus, the city of his birth (Acts 9:1; 21:39) and the presumed home of relatives. Then, at the request of Barnabas, Paul came to Antioch ad Orontes to join the Christian community there (Acts 11:25; Gal 1:18; 2:11). This thumbnail sketch of Paul's early travel reveals his pattern of traveling to locations with known social acquaintances. Paul's early movements

[13] For more on the "spatial perception" of ancient Jews and Christians, see Hezser, *Jewish Travel in Antiquity*, 21–53.
[14] Salway, "Travel, Itineraria and Tabellaria," 34.
[15] Cioffi, "Travel in the Roman World," 2.
[16] Our discussion here presumes the general historicity of the geography and itineraries in the travelogues of Acts (making no judgement about the speeches or evangelistic successes). Regarding the source of Luke's information about Paul's travels, scholars have theorized that he utilized some itinerary document. Ramsay, *Church in the Roman Empire*, 6–8 hypothesized that the independent existence of a "Travel-Document" composed under the authority of Paul lies behind Luke's narrative; Martin Dibelius, "Stilkritisches zur Apostelgeschichte," in *Eucharisterion für H. Gunkel* (Göttingen, 1923), 27–49 discerned evidence of an itinerary document indicating the places Paul visited and brief notes; Richard I. Pervo, *The Mystery of Acts: Unraveling Its Story* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge Press, 2008), 160 also favors such itineraries as a major sources for sections of Acts 16–21. Some critical scholars question the historical reliability of Acts, in favor a more literary reading; e.g., Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), xxxv–xl; Ernst Haenchen, *Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (Philadelphia, PN: Westminster John Knox Press, 1971), 81–111; Pervo, *The Mystery of Acts*, 157–72. I favor the traditional view regarding the general historicity of Acts when judged in light of fair expectations for ancient historians. For this view, see Adolf von Harnack, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrich'sche Buchhandlung, 1908); W. M. Ramsay, *The Bearing Of Recent Discovery On The Trustworthiness Of The New Testament* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1915); Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary: Volume 1: Introduction and 1:1-2:47* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 51–220. For a summary of scholarship regarding the historicity of Acts, see W. Ward Gasque, *A History of the Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1989), esp. 136–63.
[17] Richard Bauckham, "What If Paul Had Travelled East Rather Than West?," *BibInt* 8 (2000): 171–84.

were a function of connectivity.[18] To better account for the contingencies and social factors of his travel, one might better ask, How did Paul end up in Galatia?

In the narrative of Acts 13–14, a series of social links explains Paul's travel into Galatia. The journey followed lines of social connections. From Antioch, Barnabas and Paul went first to Cyprus. This destination was the home of both Barnabas (the presumptive leader) and the founding members of the church in Antioch (Acts 4:36; 11:19, 20). From Cyprus, they likely intended to travel south toward north Africa, along the social connections gained through the believers in Antioch who were from Cyrene (Acts 11:20; 13:1).[19] Travel into Galatia was not the original plan; instead, it was a result of contingent social connections. Paul and Barnabas abandoned the original destination of North Africa after they befriended and impressed Sergius Paulus in Paphos (Acts 13:7–12).[20] The Roman proconsul of Cyprus had family connections at Pisidian Antioch, a prominent Roman colony in central Galatia. Stephen Mitchell suggests that Sergius Paulus encouraged Paul to visit his *patria* and provided Paul with aid and commendation letters for his passage into Galatia.[21] After departing from

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[18] In Galatians 1:11–24, Paul emphasizes his own independence and the divine origin of his gospel. At first glance, this seems to contradict our case about the sociality of Paul's movement. However, Paul does not separate himself from all communities (as indicated by the fact that he goes to destinations with known communities: Damascus, Jerusalem, Cilicia, and Syria); instead, he separates himself from the methods of the authorities in Jerusalem who worked among the circumcised.

[19] In addition to the social connections from Antioch, three lines of evidence support the African thesis. One, Alexandria has a notable Jewish population, making it attractive for missionary efforts. Josephus emphasizes that the Jewish populations in the combined province of Egypt and Cyrene were large enough to possess notable wealth and political independence (*Ant.* 14.115–119; *Ag. Ap.* 2.33–47). Two, Cyprus was far more connected politically, militarily, economically, and culturally with Egypt than with Pamphylia; cf. Mark Wilson and Tom Davis, "The Destination of Paul's First Journey: Asia Minor or Africa," *Pharos Journal of Theology* 97 (2016): 1–14. Three, tradition suggests that Barnabas and Mark, after separating from Paul (cf. Acts 15:37–39), went to Egypt, thus fulfilling the intent of their original journey with Paul; cf. John J. Gunther, "The Association of Mark and Barnabas With Egyptian Christianity (Part I)," *EQ* 54, no. 4 (1982): 219–33; Thomas C. Oden, *The African Memory of Mark: Reassessing Early Church Tradition* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2011).

[20] Benjamin Schliesser, "Why Did Paul Skip Alexandria? Paul's Missionary Strategy and the Rise of Christianity in Alexandria," *NTS* 67 (2021): 260–83 argues that Paul intentionally avoided Alexandria as part of his mission strategy of leaving such a "Jewish city" to the Jewish-Christian missionaries. However, the paper fails to consider the theory that Alexandria was in fact Paul's intended destination until social circumstances guided him elsewhere. Moreover, he starts with the (rather questionable) "premise that Paul was a missionary strategist with a considerable spatial imagination" (p. 282), then concedes to my position in the adjoining footnote: "Paul's assumed geographical imagination was not based on 'cartographic' knowledge, but on a more topographical and relational vision as evidenced in ancient *itineraria*" (fn. 113).

[21] Mitchell, *Anatolia*, 1994, 6–7.

Cyprus by ship, they arrived at the city of Perge, located 15 kilometers inland, instead of the more-accessible coastal harbors of Side or Attalea.[22] The reason might relate to the social connections available to Paul's group in Perge. Inscriptions indicate that aristocratic families in Perge during the Claudian era possessed large estates in Galatia[23] and maintained affiliations with Roman officials in central Galatian cities, especially Iconium.[24] These elite acquaintances could have been asked to assist the entourage from Sergius Paulus. From Perge, Paul's group most likely traveled along the *Via Sebaste*.[25] Though longer than alternatives, this route along the Augustan military road from Pamphylia to Pisidian Antioch allowed them to access support en route, especially as people commended by Sergius Paulus. In Pisidian Antioch, Paul and Barnabas faced opposition from a Jewish faction and so departed from the community (Acts 13:50–51).[26] From Pisidian Antioch, they proceeded to Iconium, Lystra, and then Derbe (Acts 14:1–20). Iconium and Lystra were Roman colonies located at the termini of two spurs off the *Via Sebaste* and so offered a similar degree of connectivity for Paul's team as they considered their next destinations. Once they were banished from Lystra, the larger Lycaonian cities of Isaura Nova, Laranda, and Cybistra would have been more natural destinations than Derbe. Though the text is silent on the matter, they might have encountered in Lystra a native of Derbe, such as Gaius (Acts 20:4), whom they viewed as a providential open door to the next city.[27] For the return to Syrian Antioch, the direct and well-trod Southern Highway ran east through the Cilician Gates straight to Tarsus and then Syria.[28] Yet, Paul headed west and retraced his route of entry.

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[22] On the route of Paul's arrival into Perge, see Mark Wilson, "Saint Paul in Pamphylia: Intention, Arrival, Departure," *Adalya* 19 (2016): 229–50.

[23] Stephen Mitchell, "The Plancii in Asia Minor," *JRS* 64 (1974): 27–39.

[24] Fatih Onur, "Two Procuratorian Inscriptions from Perge," *Gephyra* 5 (2008): 63–65.

[25] Wilson, "The Route of Paul's First Journey to Pisidian Antioch." Of the three routes from Perge to Pisidian Antioch, Wilson convincingly argues for the western route (i.e., *Via Sebaste*) because it was the easiest and best-paved. One could add a social argument to the case: if Paul was escorted by officials of S. Paulus, they would have preferred the western route, as that was a military route with established provisions for Roman officials. See also Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), II: 1075–76.

[26] Shaking the dust off their feet represents a mutual rejection (cf. Mk 6:10-11//Mt 10:11–15; Lk 9:4–5; cf. Acts 18:6).

[27] Bob Wagner and Mark Wilson, "Why Derbe? An Unlikely Lycaonian City for Paul's Ministry," *TynBul* 70, no. 1 (2019): 83–84.

[28] This was the route of the κοινή οδός, which developed in the Hellenistic era to traverse the Asia Minor plateau and perhaps even formed the (southern?) Persian Royal Road across Anatolia.

Though over twice as long,[29] this route reconnected him with the new congregations and allowed him to revisit Perge (Acts 14:25), confirming the influence of social connectivity in Paul's travel.

Social ties had a pull and push effect on Paul's movement. Relational connections created open channels for movement, pulling them to new locations, while rejection from the communities severed those connections and pushed them to new locales. Galatia was likely not Paul's intended destination according to an empire-wide mission strategy. Instead, Paul's journey into Galatia resulted from social connections enabling that line of movement. Social connectivity shaped Paul's *ad hoc* itinerary into and through Galatia.[30] Like someone navigating their way through a corn maze, Paul the traveler was uncertain about his exact destination and overall course, and thus selected his route as social ties availed themselves. His travel was contingent upon the availability of social connections.[31]

To better understand the nature of Paul's connection with the Galatians, we can use two concepts developed by sociologist Mark Granovetter—"embeddedness" and "weak ties." Social theorists have long discussed the effect of relations upon behavior. Classical economics thought that behavior in premarket societies stemmed from repressive structures binding people, whereas market economies consisted of autonomous and atomized participants free of social obligations. To recalibrate these "oversocialized" and "undersocialized" models of social exchanges, Granovetter spoke of "embeddedness."[32] Behaviors are typically facilitated (and constrained) by ongoing social relations. Interpersonal actions are embedded within networks of relations. This observation aids our sociological analysis of ancient travel. As Paul and his companions considered potential destinations, concrete personal relations opened pathways of movement. Their social embeddedness determined their scope of potential movements and destinations. Networks of known people

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[29] Based on ORBIS, the direct overland route was 474 km and 14 days; the chosen route was 1177 km and 23.8 days. The latter does not seem to account for the fact that Paul would have been traveling against the prevailing easterlies sailing toward Antioch from Attalea.

[30] G. H. R Horsley, "The Inscriptions of Ephesos and the New Testament," *NovT* 34, no. 2 (1992): 140–41 makes a similar argument, emphasizing Barnabas' family ties in Cyprus and S. Paulus' links with Antioch.

[31] For more on the continency in Paul's travels, see Donaldson, "Geography and Mission in Paul"; Schellenberg, "Perils of Travel."

[32] Mark S. Granovetter, "Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness," *American Journal of Sociology* 91, no. 3 (1985): 481–510.

allowed for requisite levels of trust and reliability—essential elements for ancient travelers experiencing socio-physical displacement. Social ties created the potential for connectivity and opened up new routes and destinations. The developing nature of that social network created (and severed!) links with certain destinations. Paul traveled into Galatia as a person embedded within a network.

Granovetter's more popular theory of "weak ties" also informs the nature of Paul's travel among the Galatians. Weak ties are interpersonal connections with limited intensity and intimacy.[33] Like the proverbial "friend-of-a-friend," they are bridges to other social groups. Granovetter notes their value—"Weak ties are an important resource in making possible mobility."[34] Paul's connections on the journey, as we reconstructed, were primarily weak ties developed through acquaintances or incidental events. His movements followed other people's relational connections. But then, because of Paul's travel and the resulting hospitality encounter, the community of Christians in Galatia became "strong ties" for Paul. The text of Galatians expresses emotional intensity and personal confiding (cf. Gal 1:6–11; 3:1–5; 4:12–20), the hallmarks of strong ties. Those deepened connections with communities in Galatia became significant because Galatia became Paul's gateway for movements farther westward. After his initial visit to Galatia, Paul proceeded to provinces located on the "other side" of Galatia—Asia, Macedonia, and Achaia (Acts 15:30–20:38). Later, in Romans, we see Paul's strategy of leveraging his ties with the community in Rome to foster new ties facilitating travel to an unreached region farther west in Spain. Weak ties opened routes of travel for Paul; then that travel produced strong ties, which created new weak ties for further travel. This pattern characterized the broad movements of Paul's missionary career: connections from Antioch led to Galatia, his second visit to Galatia lead him into Asia Minor and Achaia, that ministry season fostered new connections with Rome, and the community in Rome became his bridge for getting to Spain. Travel resulted from "weak ties" and produced new relational connections that proved crucial in his missionary labors. Travel and community were mutually generative in Paul's ministry.

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[33] Mark S. Granovetter, "The Strength of Weak Ties," *American Journal of Sociology* 78, no. 6 (1973): 1360–80.

[34] Granovetter, "The Strength of Weak Ties," 1373; his discussion of "mobility" generally refers to "social mobility" (i.e., landing a new job), but geographic and physical aspects of mobility are not excluded.

This section observed aspects of Paul's movement into Galatia, especially motive, velocity, and route (cf. §2.1.1), to shed light on why and how Paul ended up in Galatia, of all places. Building upon the fact that geographical knowledge in antiquity was more communal than spatial, we traced Paul's movement along lines of social connectivity. This provides the socio-historical background of Paul's representation of his travel into Galatia in Gal 4:12–20.

§3.2 Paul's Representation of Travel in Gal 4:12–20

In the personal appeal of Gal 4:12–20, Paul discusses aspects of his initial encounter with the Galatians. He mentions the fact that he became like them when visiting (4:12a), the Galatians' notable reception of Paul (vv. 12b–14), the Galatians' subsequent turning toward other itinerant teachers (vv. 15–17), and Paul's desire to return to them in person (vv. 18–20). Throughout Gal 4:12–20, Paul, in essence, argues for his "ideological construct," a particular interpretation of the meaning of travel (cf. §2.1). The passage offers a rich source of information about the meaning and function of Paul's travel. Moreover, attentiveness to travel dynamics helps resolve interpretive issues in the seemingly erratic argument of Gal 4:12–20 that has left interpreters "resort[ing] to guesswork."[35] This section works through the passage exegetically, noting the social and theological meaning that Paul attributed to his travel in Galatia.

The section opens with the letter's first imperative—that the Galatians become like Paul (Γίνεσθε ὡς ἐγώ, 4:12). This resembles Paul's frequent language about imitation,[36] then offers a causal clause: "for I have also become as you are" (ὅτι κἀγὼ ὡς ὑμεῖς). In what sense was Paul "like" the Galatians? At the level of religious practices, Paul became like them in the sense that he was a Christ-follower who did not recognize the authority of the Torah as a means of distinction, but now relates to people based on their adoption into Abraham's family through faith (cf. 1 Cor 9:19–23). Gal 1–2 emphasizes Paul's commitment to this gospel. Thus, the Galatians were likewise to reject the yoke of the Torah and walk in the Spirit, as did Paul. However, Paul's call to mutual imitation refers to more than religious practices or theological convictions. Paul became "like them" not merely by adopting new ideas of "justification" or "Abrahamic descent." He also embodied the social implications of

[35] Betz, *Galatians*, 231.
[36] 1 Cor 4:16–17; 11:1; 1 Thess 1:6: 2:14; Phil 3:17; 4:9

those redefinitions in his personal visit to Galatia. Paul thus recalls his initial arrival into Galatia as a relationally transformative event.[37] By traveling into Galatia, Paul became "like one of them," a member of their community. Paul's commitment to the gospel propelled him toward the Galatians in both physical and social senses. His personal presence performed their solidarity in Christ (cf. 3:28).[38] Paul's arrival represented a pursuit of mutual friendship reflecting Christocentric and cruciform notions of worth (instead of Torah observance). As Betz has noted, Paul's exhortation toward mutual imitation applies friendship language to their relationship.[39] Because the Galatians had abandoned that relationship, Paul here summons them back to "being like him," a person committed to friendships that embody a cruciform code of honor. In the opening imperative, this social commitment performed through travel and hospitality is layered upon a sense of religious alignment in being like one another.

To support this initial appeal, Paul narrates their past relationship (vv. 12c–17). He first remarks, "You have done me no wrong" (οὐδέν με ἠδικήσατε, Gal 4:12). This statement could be read as a blanket dismissal of any hurt, like an offering of amnesty from Paul for a potential offense.[40] However, considering the temporal scope of the surrounding verses, Paul's claim appears to be a specific reference to the earlier period of his initial arrival—the Galatians did not harm Paul when he first arrived. Betz finds this remark to be "asyndetic" and "puzzling."[41] Yet, the remark becomes significant considering the dynamics of ancient travelers. Communities were generally suspicious of ξένοι. They are potential threats to be avoided, or vulnerable targets to be mistreated and despoiled (§2.2). Agonistic tendencies led people to challenge and attack non-kin for their own gain. The fact that the Galatians did not harm the itinerant outsider demonstrated the genuineness of their friendship with him. Aristotle stated that the essential bond between friends is "mutual trust (τὸ πιστεύειν), the inability to do any harm (ἀδικῆσαι)."[42] Such assumptions lie behind Paul's presentation of his initial encounter with the Galatians. To not harm was an expression of the Galatians' faith(fulness) and proof of relational mutuality. His audience's positive response to Paul upon

[37] David A. deSilva, *The Letter to the Galatians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018), 378.
[38] J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians* (New Haven, CN; London: Yale University Press, 2004), 420.
[39] Betz, *Galatians*, 22.
[40] deSilva, *Galatians*, 379.
[41] Betz, *Galatians*, 223.
[42] Aristotle, *Nic. Ethics*, 8.4.3, p. 1157a 23f.

his arrival was a stark contrast to the rejection and persecution that he encountered from his hostile opponents in Galatia. Paul considered their peculiar behavior toward him at the outset of their relationship as an expression of underlying theological convictions and proof of their Christian character.[43]

In verse 13, Paul states the occasion of his visit to Galatia—he evangelized them δι' ἀσθένειαν τῆς σαρκός. As discussed above (§3.1), there is no convincing explanation for how a physical malady led Paul into the province of Galatia. Rather, he came to Pisidian Antioch via his social connections with Sergius Paulus and others while having some physical ailment. The most likely origin for his ἀσθένεια would be persecution (cf. Gal 5:11; 6:17; Acts 13–14; 2 Tim 3:11). Opponents of Paul's message used physical aggression to disparage and banish him from their community. The conflict likely caused unappealing physical disfiguration and perhaps even an eye injury or sight impairment.[44] Paul's ἀσθένεια was the result of being ill-treated in ministry (cf. 1 Cor 4:9–13; 2 Cor 11:21–29), the mark of suffering and persecution from opponents.[45] Paul's physical illness manifested his social rejection that drove him into new communities. The Galatians had seen Paul's physical stigmata for themselves. He claimed that "Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified" before the Galatians' eyes (3:1). Christ crucified here does not refer to the message of Paul's verbal proclamation, but, instead, to the physical nature of Paul's presence amidst the Galatians. Paul also mentions his ongoing persecution (5:11) and refers to "the marks of Jesus" on his body (6:17). Throughout his ministry, Paul presented his physical body as a

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[43] Bruce Longenecker, *The Triumph of Abraham's God: The Transformation of Identity in Galatians* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 159.

[44] Among modern interpreters, ophthalmia has been the most frequent explanation of Paul's weakness. Paul did seem to have an eye condition, but it was a visible symptom of his ἀσθένεια, not the primary referent of the ἀσθένεια. The most immediate evidence for an eye problem is Paul's reminder that the Galatians would have removed and shared their own eyes with him (4:15), which could be literal or euphemistic. He later notes how he wrote "with such large letters" (6:11), which could be a rhetorical emphasis or the result of poor eyesight. Later traditions in Acts offer additional clues. Paul had a dramatic incident with blindness at his Damascus calling (Acts 9:9–19) and could not recognize the high priests (Acts 23:5). These clues provide cumulative evidence in favor of an eye problem, probably periodically and not permanent, as Paul did regularly travel and read. Cf. Ben Witherington, *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 309–10. Wagner and Wilson, "Why Derbe?," 58 postulate that the stoning at Lystra damaged Paul's vision, as sight impairment is a known symptom of traumatic brain injury.

[45] A.J. Goddard and S.A. Cummins, "Ill or Ill-Treated? Conflict and Persecution as the Context of Paul's Original Ministry in Galatia (Galatians 4.12-20)," *JSNT* 16, no. 52 (1993): 93–126.

public billboard for displaying Christ's crucifixion across the Mediterranean (2 Cor 4:10; Gal 3:1; 6:17; Phil 3:10; cf. Col 1:24). Paul's ἀσθένεια broadcasted Christ crucified and produced in his body a direct encounter with the cross, a symbol of social weakness and physical infirmity.[46] Thus, ἀσθένεια conjures up both Paul's social inferiority as one persecuted and the resultant physical condition. Paul's flesh bore the stigmata of persecution—a visual display of the cross, yet a potential stumbling block for his audience. While Paul was in such a state of illness (δι' ἀσθένειαν), the Galatians encountered and received the traveler and his message.

Paul's arrival in Galatia as a disfigured and rejected person constituted a "trial" for the Galatians (τὸν πειρασμὸν ὑμῶν ἐν τῇ σαρκί μου, v. 14).[47] At the material level, they bore a financial "burden" when accommodating someone needing sustenance and medical care. The Galatians also bore the social ridicule of being associated with a stigmatized person. Hosting disfigured outsiders would have generated gossip. Despite the costs, the community of believers in Galatia bore the burden of welcoming Paul (cf. Gal 6:2). The Galatians' πειρασμός involved a second, more fundamental, aspect. Their "trial" was a test, or examination, revealing the Galatians' true character. As discussed in the context of Homer's *Odyssey* (§2.3.2), a host's response to the arrival of a guest revealed the host's identity. When Paul arrived, in a new Galatian city, with the wounds of persecution, he examined who they were by the burdens they endured to welcome him. The guest commends the Galatians for passing their "test" with high marks.[48]

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[46] Das, *Galatians*, 459.

[47] The syntax here is awkward, as the accusative τὸν πειρασμόν appears as the direct object of ἐξουθενήσατε οὐδὲ ἐξεπτύσατε. A direct translation reads, "you did not despise or loathe your temptation/trial in my flesh" (cf. NASB). However, most translations and commentators separate the verbs and the object clause into two sentences. This requires inserting a verb with τὸν πειρασμόν, the object "me" after the verbs, and concessive language linking the two clauses. Thus, "though my condition put you to the test, you did not scorn or despise me" (NRSV; cf. NIV, NET).

[48] Contra Nasrallah, "Travel and Hospitality," 100, Paul's statement in Gal 4:14 is not an admission of his imposition, but an acknowledgment of the Galatians' notable generosity in welcoming and hosting him. Nasrallah also asserts that Gal 4:15 ("you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me") and 4:17–20 use language that "activates the political and transactional" as evidence that people who "travel as part of the Christ movement impose upon the local Galatians who wish to affiliate with Christ" (100–1). But Paul's remarks hardly justify such a conclusion about the power dynamics in the relationship.

The Galatians unexpectedly welcomed Paul with honor. In the ancient world, poverty and sickness implied disfavor from the gods; such shameful defects were despised.[49] Some Christians in Corinth had a negative response to Paul's physical impairments. They interpreted his frailties as being incompatible with a position of status, such as apostle (2 Cor 12:7–10).[50] Despite general prejudices, the Galatians did not "scorn and despise" him (οὐκ ἐξουθενήσατε οὐδὲ ἐξεπτύσατε).[51] The term δέχομαι and its cognates describes the behavior of hosts in hospitality relationships.[52] The action of welcoming and receiving confers respect upon the guests, the antithesis of "despise and scorn." The Galatians had not merely hosted an individual in Paul, but they had physically embodied his cruciform message with its different rubrics for human worth and status.

The so-called "Ben Franklin effect" illuminates Paul's initial interaction with the Galatians and the resultant social identities. In his autobiography, the American statesman Ben Franklin revealed his clever method for befriending an opponent—he asked to borrow a rare book from that individual's personal library. From then on, they spoke with great civility and were great friends. The incident led to Franklin's maxim, "He that has once done you a kindness will be more ready to do you another than he whom you yourself have obliged."[53] Researchers have since confirmed this psychological phenomenon.[54] When someone performs a favor for an unknown or disliked person, the action results in a higher estimation of the recipient. People come to like the people to whom they have given benefits.[55] This occurs because people struggle to view themselves as individuals who would

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[49] deSilva, *Galatians*, 380.

[50] Timothy B. Savage, *Power through Weakness: Paul's Understanding of the Christian Ministry in 2 Corinthians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 19–53.

[51] The verbs are paired together in Joseph and Aseneth 2:1: "Now Aseneth despised all men and regarded them with contempt" (trans. Sparks, *The Apocryphal Old Testament* [OUP, 1984]), in the sense that she did not receive suitors who pursued a relationship with her. The onomatopoeic verb ἐκπτύω literally means "to spit (out/upon)." This might have been a common apotropaic behavior to ward off evil spirits, but it manifests primarily social disgust and inferiority, thus "despise."

[52] Chariton 1.14.2; Longus 4.5; Dio Chrysostom, *Ven.* 7.52, 82, 83, 88; Achilles Tatius 8.4.1; 8.8.11; Tob. 7.8; Wis. 19.14; Josephus, *Ant*. 5.145; 8.326; Lk. 10.38; 19.16; Acts 17.7; 28.7; Rom 16.1-2; 1 Cor 16.10-12; Col 4.10; *Did* 11.1-2, 4-6; 12.1-2; 1 *Clem.* 12.3; 28.2; 54.3; Ign., *Rom* 9.3; *Eph* 6.1; Hermas, *Sim.* 9.27.2; cf. Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 46, 54, 93, 131.

[53] Benjamin Franklin, *Autobiography and Other Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 105.

[54] Jon Jecker and David Landy, "As a Function of Doing Him a Favour," *Human Relations* 22, no. 4 (1969): 371–78; John Schopler and John Compere, "Effects of Being Kind or Harsh to Another on Liking," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 20, no. 2 (1971): 155–59.

[55] Jecker and Landy, "Liking a Person," 371–72.

help bad or undeserving people. To reduce the cognitive dissonance and rationalize the favor, the giver increases their estimation of the recipient and considers them more likable. Humans desire to give to "worthy" people, so the act of giving has the effect of increasing the recipient's perceived worth. In the case of Paul and the Galatians, Paul would have arrived as someone relatively unknown, an acquaintance at best. According to the "Ben Franklin effect," the Galatians' initial hospitality toward Paul caused the unknown itinerant to become "worthy" of that reception. Their response to the itinerant elevated his status in their eyes. Paul became someone different because the Galatians had welcomed him. His travel into Galatia generated the hospitality that seemingly made him a more esteemed and revered person in their eyes.

The Galatians had, in fact, welcomed Paul "as a divine emissary, as Messiah Jesus" (ἀλλὰ ὡς ἄγγελον θεοῦ ἐδέξασθέ με, ὡς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν, v. 14b). They treated the itinerant as a divine representative of Christ.[56] So the Galatians, in welcoming Paul, had received Christ. Their hospitality ratified their relationship with Paul and confirmed their standing with Christ. Paul praises the Galatians for the extravagant honors they bestowed upon him. For Paul, this type of reception was far more than a polite gesture or token of guest-friendship. It represented the Galatians' acceptance of his cruciform message and the crucified messiah

In their initial encounter, the Galatians had recognized Paul as an ἀπόστολος, a person divinely commissioned with authority. However, after that initial visit, the outside agitators sowed doubt and the Galatians lost confidence that Paul was "a sent one." The Galatians, in effect, questioned Paul's mobile identity; he no longer traveled as a person from God. So the opening salvo of Galatians offers an impassioned defense of Paul's divine commission (1:1, 6–24) to emphasize that Paul did in fact come to them as a divine representative. The Galatians' initial reception of him indicated their acceptance of his claim as being "from God." Paul recalls the Galatians' hospitality to reassert his own mobile identity as a divinely-sent apostle, a key aspect of his argument to the Galatians.

At this point in our discussion of Paul's arrival into Galatia, we might consider the nature of Paul's socio-economic relationship with the Galatians. To utilize Polyani's popular

[56] 2 Cor 2:14–17; 5:18–20; 13:3–4; Col 1:24–2:5

anthropological paradigm about modes of exchange,[57] did Paul resort to *redistribution* (forcing payment to an authority) or rely upon *reciprocity* (the voluntary exchange of gifts) when interacting with the Galatians? As discussed in §1.5, Nasrallah has proposed that Paul burdensomely imposed upon the local communities, akin to Roman officials requisitioning supplies.[58] While this post-colonial reading raises intriguing questions about the political nature of traveler-host relations, her reconstruction faces several problems. A brief assessment of the matter helps to clarify the terms of social exchange during Paul's travel in Galatia. One, requestions were not feasible for an itinerant Jew such as Paul. Only authorized political elites and military personnel could commandeer supplies.[59] Even when requisitions were permitted, moral sensibilities restrained such behavior. Elite travelers such as Cicero and Augustus avoided making demands upon host communities as an expression of virtue.[60] Paul himself was also rather conscious of not imposing burdens on his hosts.[61] A non-elite civilian, such as Paul, retained no legal or moral claim to requisition supplies. Two, the depiction of Paul as burdensome misrepresents the ancient practice of hospitality.[62] Hosts were eager to fulfill their social role of attending to hosts, often treating them as divine figures (cf. Acts 14:8–18; 28:6–10). Despite the financial costs, hosts derived status from such generosity to guests (cf. §2.3.2). The skeptical view of Paul among the Galatians itself imposes anachronistic, modernist assumptions upon guest-host relations in antiquity.[63] Three, our primary evidence for their initial relationship—Gal 4:12–20—indicates that the Galatians

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[57] Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (New York: Rinehart, 1944), esp. 43–55.

[58] Nasrallah, *Archaeology and the Letters of Paul*, 76–104.

[59] The inscription that Nasrallah uses as comparanda for Paul's travel (*SEG* 26:1392) itself states, "The right to use this service will not be granted to everyone, but to the procurator of the best of princes of his son [and] to persons on military service. … I want nothing to be provided for those who transport grain or anything else of that sort for their own use" (l. 32–34, 48–50). Cf. *SEG* 59.1365, l. 15–16, 35–42, a similar Hadrianic edict. About the categories of travelers that abused the system, see Stephen Mitchell, "Requisitioned Transport in the Roman Empire: A New Inscription from Pisidia," *JRS* 66 (1976): 114–15.

[60] Cicero, *ad Att*. 5.16; Suet., *Aug.* 53.2; cf. Cicero, *Verr.*, 2.1.53-86.

[61] 1 Cor 9:11–18; 2 Cor 11:7–12; 12:13–18; 1 Thess 2:9–10; 2 Thess 3:7–9. Ryan S. Schellenberg, "Did Paul Refuse an Offer of Support from the Corinthians?," *JSNT* 40, no. 3 (2018): 312–36 shows that Paul's boast of not burdening others meant that he refrained from demanding their support, not that he refused their offer of support.

[62] Pitt-Rivers, "The Law of Hospitality."

[63] E.g., Jacques Derrida and Anne Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 77 address "the rights and the duties that are imposed on hosts and hostesses"; on the pejorative reassessment of social obligations in modern morality, see Peter Berger, "On the Obsolescence of the Concept of Honor," in *Revisions, Changing Perspectives in Moral Philosophy*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and Alasdair C. MacIntyre (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983).

welcomed Paul willingly and eagerly. The communities in Galatia did not malign or harm him (ἀδικέω), welcomed him as a divine figure (δέχομαι), considered him to be a person favored by God (μακαρισμός), and zealously pursued him as a noble person (ζηλοῦσθαι). The Galatians initiated steps to develop a reciprocal relationship with the newly-arrived traveler. Paul's recollection of their encounter works rhetorically only if it reliably reflects their shared history, as the Galatians could easily discredit any exaggeration or fabrication. Four, various other sources indicate the Galatians' positive and hospitable welcome of Paul. He revisited the Galatian churches twice (Acts 16:6; 18:23) and they participated financially in his ongoing ministry (Acts 16:3–4; 20:4; 1 Cor 16:1)—factors suggesting a non-coercive relationship. Acts 14:8–18 centers the Galatians' radical hospitality by recounting the Lycaonians' extravagant reception of Paul and Barnabas in a way that echoes the legend of Baucus and Philemon, a well-known moralistic tale about sacrificial hospitality.[64] The opening scene of the second-century Acts of Paul (3.1–13) also recounts his arrival into Galatia in a manner accentuating the locals' positive reception of him.[65] A certain Onesiphorus waited for Paul along the road entering Iconium "in order that he might entertain him" (Act Paul 3.2, trans. Elliott).[66] The emphasis on hospitality and its importance in the narrative implies some historical tradition about the Galatians' hearty welcome extended to Paul.[67] For these reasons, Nasrallah's use of requestions as *comparanda* misrepresents the meaning of Paul's travel, the Galatians' own agency, and the nature of their socio-economic relationship. Rather than imposing upon the Galatians as a superior (*redistribution*), Paul was a guest dependent upon the willing generosity of the host community (*reciprocity*).

The pointed and rhetorical question in verse 15—"So then, where is your blessing?" (ποῦ οὖν ὁ μακαρισμὸς ὑμῶν;)—represents a shift in the Galatians' evaluation of Paul. The expression ὁ μακαρισμὸς ὑμῶν can be interpreted in several ways depending on the grantor and the

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[64] Ovid, *Metamorphasis*, 8.614–724; cf. Hesiod, *Astronomy* 3; Eratosthenes *Catasterismi* 16.1–31; Hyginus, *Fabulae* 176.

[65] Acts Paul is generally dated to the latter half of the second century, based on Tertullian's comment regarding the text's origin (*On Baptism* 17). For discussions of dating, see Stephen J. Davis, *The Cult of St Thecla* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 7–8; Jeremy W. Barrier, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla: A Critical Introduction and Commentary* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 23–24.

[66] In early Christian traditions, the figure of Onesiphorus provides housing and assistance to apostles (2 Tim 1:16–18; 4:19; Acts Pet. Andr. 13–21).

[67] Ramsay, *Church in the Roman Empire*, 66.

recipient of the "blessing."[68] The surrounding verses elaborate on the Galatians' estimation of Paul, so it seems best to understand μακαρισμός as the Galatians' disposition toward Paul. Paul askes, in a sense, "What happened to your earlier view that I was someone favored by God?"[69] The Galatians had once conferred a positive status upon Paul. Despite Paul's disfigurement, they acknowledged him as an honored and privileged person worthy of esteem. In fact, they would have been willing to extract and gift their own eyes—a precious organ and valuable possession.[70] The Galatians had once esteemed Paul as a person of divine favor and "blessing," but those sentiments were now absent.

In light of the relational change, Paul addresses the source of the issue—rival teachers having wooed away the Galatians (vv. 17–18). The meaning of the verses hinges on the meaning of ζηλόω and καλός, which both appear three times. The verb ζηλόω refers to the intense pain of lacking and consequently desiring some good.[71] Here, in v. 18, the verb carries the sense of "to court" or "take intense interest in someone" (cf. 2 Cor 11:2).[72] The language depicts a competitive scene. Paul had courted the Galatians and gained their affection. Then, upon his departure, another suitor appeared at their door, expressing great interest and capturing their hearts. This courtship language of amorous lovers often described the relationship between a

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[68] Betz prefers the secular translation of "praise" with a possessive genitive: "What has become of your praise (that you had earned)?" (*Galatians,* 226–27; cf. ESV, "your blessedness"). Bruce reads it in a reflexive sense, as "self-congratulations"; the Galatians congratulated themselves with the arrival of good news (*Galatians*, 210). Lightfoot reads the genitive as objective; the Galatians felt "felicitation" in Paul's teaching (*Galatians*, 176; cf. Jerome, *Commentary on Galatians*, at 4:15). Martyn similarly reads it as the intense elation and joy that characterized their reception of the gospel (*Galatians*, 421). The reading favored above takes the phrase as a subjective genitive.

[69] BDAG s.v., "pronouncement of being in receipt of a special favor." Cf. deSilva, *Galatians*, 381. The other Pauline uses of μακαρισμός are Rom 4:6, 9 (cf. 1 Clem 50:5–7), in which God "reckons" and grants μακαρισμός upon people. The term parallels δικαιοσύνη in Paul's argument, and so refers to God's (unexpected and unmerited) declaration of acceptability or pronouncement of favored status; for an argument that μακάριος means "considered honorable," see K.C. Hanson, "How Honorable! How Shameful! A Cultural Analysis of Matthew's Makarisms and Reproaches," *Semeia*, no. 68 (1994): 81–111. Sib. Or. 13.117 uses μακαρισμός to convey a similar status reversal: "To the dying, the living say a blessing (μακαρισμόν) by mouth and pronounce death beautiful (καλόν)."

[70] The hyperbolic nature of Paul's image does not negate any physical referent to Paul's eyes, contra Betz (*Galatians*, 228) and deSilva (*Galatians*, 382), who say we should not assume this was a clue that his eyes were afflicted. In Lucian's oft-cited story (*Toxaris*, 40–41), the point works only because the two friends actually extracted their physical eyes.

[71] Hence, the common glosses, "to be zealous (for)," "to be jealous (of)," and "to emulate." Cf. Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 2.11.1–7.

[72] J.B Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (London: Macmillan, 1914), 176; Betz, *Galatians*, 229; Martyn, *Galatians*, 442; deSilva, *Galatians*, 383–84.

teacher and their students.[73] Paul warns the Galatians about the agitators' corrupted motives. They had convinced the Gentiles in Galatia that they were not members of God's promised covenant (ζηλοῦσιν ὑμᾶς οὐ καλῶς, ἀλλὰ ἐκκλεῖσαι ὑμᾶς θέλουσιν) so that the Galatians would pursue and imitate them, the Torah-observant teachers (ἵνα αὐτοὺς ζηλοῦτε). The agitators sought to heighten their own status by excluding Paul's converts from the community (cf. 6:12–13).[74] Paul's language frames their arrival into Galatia as a subjugating invasion fueled by self-interest.

Paul's knowledge about and depiction of the agitators reveals tidbits about the implications of travel within early Christian networks. Though the agitators' precise identity remains unclear, Paul's language suggests that they were outsiders who came into Galatia. Paul speaks to the Galatians as "you," but refers to the opponents as "they," as though they were not part of the Galatian community (cf. Gal 1:6–7; 3:1; 4:12–20; 5:7–12; 6:12–13).[75] We might construct the historical sequence as follows. After Paul left Galatia, the rival teachers learned about Paul's missionary activities from someone in Galatia. Disgruntled by the antinomian practices of Christians in Galatia, they brought their teaching into the region (either in person or through a representative). Then, someone brought detailed information about the agitators' teaching and the Galatians' response to Paul.[76] These travel events created a web of interdependent connections that informed social identities and relational ties. The situation was contingent upon a particular series of mobile events. To consider a counterfactual, if the agitators had not ventured into Galatia, or if Paul had not heard a report of their work, the "Galatian controversy" would not have occurred and the text of Galatians would not have been authored. However, that set of historical contingencies did occur and the churches in Galatia found themselves within a social web with ties to competing itinerants. They were not

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[73] Plutarch*, On Moral Virtue* 8 [448]; Chrysostom, *Gal. Comm.*. 4.17.

[74] David Harvey, "Face in Galatians: 'Boasting in the Cross' as Reconfigured Honour in Paul's Letter" (PhD diss., University of Manchester, 2017).

[75] Considering Paul's references to Jerusalem as the home of the Jewish mission (Gal 1:17–18; 2:1; 4:25–26), the Jewish-Christian missionaries rivaling Paul perhaps come from Palestine. Robert Jewett, "The Agitators and the Galatian Congregation," *NTS* 17, no. 2 (1971): 198–212 argues the agitators were influenced by the Zealot campaign in Galilee and Judea into a "nomistic campaign" against fellow Christians; John M. G. Barclay, *Obeying the Truth: Paul's Ethics in Galatians* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998), 43–44 weighs the various proposals, yet remains uncertain in light of the limited material.

[76] Paul seems familiar with the opponents' motives (4:17; 6:13) and specific theological arguments, such as Abraham as a proof for circumcision and texts for supporting Torah observance. On the agitators' argumentation, see Barclay, *Obeying the Truth*, 52–56, 65–66.

exclusively "Pauline." Counter-missionaries traveled into Galatia and competed with Paul for the same group of people.[77] Christian communities were not isolated units or under the jurisdiction of one particular leader. They were points within a broader, interconnected constellation of diverse Christians.[78] Travel not only transmitted information about happenings to the various parties, but also sharpened the identities of network participants. News about Paul's mission to Galatia drove the Jewish-Christian agitators to theological reflection and missionary action. Then, counter information about the agitators' arrival in Galatia compelled Paul to reinforce his mobile identity as one sent by God and welcomed by the Galatians. Travel invoked a proverbial tug-of-war for the Galatians' social and theological allegiances. The result was a sharpening of resolve and identity among the competing missionaries. The controversy generated enough energy to propel multiple journeys into Galatia.

The Galatians thus found themselves pulled between two suitors. To help them wisely choose whom to court, Paul appeals to notions of τὸ καλόν (beautiful, noble, honorable) through a proverbial statement in verse 18: "It is always good to court in a noble way" (καλὸν δὲ ζηλοῦσθαι ἐν καλῷ πάντοτε). Whom did Paul have in mind as the subject of ζηλοῦσθαι?[79] For many interpreters, this refers to Paul's noble zeal for the Galatians in contrast to the agitators' dishonorable zeal for them.[80] However, older interpreters read the statement as Paul's exhortation for the Galatians to pursue and imitate him.[81] In light of Paul's repeated mention of his physical presence with them (vv. 13–14, 18, 20), the "zeal" in question apparently refers to the Galatians' response to Paul. "The description of the Galatians' initial

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[77] David G. Horrell, "Pauline Churches or Early Christian Churches? Unity, Disagreement, and the Eucharist," in *Einheit der Kirche im Neuen Testament*, ed. A. Alexeev, C. Karakolis, and U. Luz (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 192.

[78] Paul was not protective of his "turf," but rejoiced that other teachers visited the communities he founded, assuming they were faithful ministers (cf. 1 Cor 3:4–15; Phil 1:15–18).

[79] The infinitive could be read as a middle (NIV, NKJV) or passive (ESV, NRSV). I opt for the middle sense in light of Paul's argument referring to the Galatians' prior behavior.

[80] Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 212; Martyn, *Galatians*, 423; Witherington, *Grace in Galatia*, 314; deSilva, *Galatians*, 385. For a summary of interpretations on Galatians 4:18, see Benjamin J. Lappenga, "Misdirected Emulation and Paradoxical Zeal: Paul's Redefinition of 'The Good' as Object of Ζῆλος in Galatians 4:12–20," *JBL* 131, no. 4 (2012): 777–82.

[81] Vulgate ("Bonum autem aemulamini [deponent] in bono semper"); Chrysostom, *Gal. Comm.* 4.18 (*PG* 61:660); Jerome, *Gal. Comm.* 4.18 (*PL* 26:384) Martin Luther, *A Commentary on Saint Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (Philadelphia: Quaker City Pub., 1872), 492–93; Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*, 177.

reception of Paul in vv. 13–14 is precisely the description of the activity described by the phrase καλὸν δὲ ζηλοῦσθαι ἐν καλῷ πάντοτε."[82] The proverbial statement in v. 18 points back to the eager hospitality the Galatians extended to Paul in person. Paul commends the Galatians for zealously courting and welcoming him upon his arrival.

This language about pursuing "in a noble manner" (ἐν καλῷ) echoes ancient rhetoricians. Aristotle said that people should maintain ζῆλος toward honorable men who possessed "wealth, a number of friends, positions of office, and all similar things."[83] Reputable people courted/pursued/imitated things of true and legitimate honor. In a passage offering a helpful foil to Paul's rhetoric in Gal 4:12–20, the Attic orator Isocrates derided certain orators who praised impoverished itinerant philosophers:

> [N]ow certain men…have the effrontery to write that the life of beggars and exiles [ὁ τῶν πτωχευόντων καὶ φευγόντων βίος] is more enviable [ζηλωτότερος] than that of the rest of mankind, and they use this as a proof that, if they can speak ably on ignoble subjects [περὶ πονηρῶν πραγμάτων], it follows that in dealing with subjects of real worth [τῶν καλῶν κἀγαθῶν] they would easily find an abundance of arguments.…But as it is, their conduct resembles that of an athlete who, although pretending to be the best of all athletes, enters a contest in which no one would condescend to meet him. For what sensible man would undertake to praise misfortunes? No, it is obvious that they take refuge in such topics because of weakness [δι᾽ ἀσθένειαν].[84]

Upon his arrival in Galatia, Paul fitted Isocrates' profile of an ignoble person unworthy of envy or praise. He was a beggar and exile, speaking about ignoble subjects (i.e., crucifixion) and characterized by weakness. Paul was hardly the type of vagabond whom ancients were eager to envy/imitate/court/pursue (ζηλοῦσθαι). By standard measures, he was not good/noble/honorable (καλός). In light of those social tendencies, Paul's language about courting and pursuing ἐν καλῷ becomes a shroud for moral subversion and redefining καλός.[85] Throughout his apostolic ministry, Paul combated prevailing Greco-Roman

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[82] Lappenga, "Misdirected Emulation and Paradoxical Zeal," 789.
[83] *Rhet.* 2.11.2 (1388e), trans. *Aristotle in 23 Volumes*, Vol. 22, translated by J. H. Freese (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press; William Heinemann Ltd. 1926.
[84] *Discourse 10: Helen* (*Helenae encomium*) 8–11; trans. Van Hook, LCL.
[85] Lappenga, "Misdirected Emulation and Paradoxical Zeal," 789–92.

assumptions about what was "noble" and thus worthy of acceptance. He reconfigured notions of beauty and honor (cf.1 Cor 1:26–31; Phil 4:8–9). The Galatians had once displayed zeal toward the vagabond apostle "in a (truly) noble manner," and so Paul summons them back to such ζῆλος.

Paul's closing lines in the section repeat his desire to be present with the Galatians (vv. 18, 20). The assumption is that traveling into Galatia would change their view. A return visit would provide Paul with an opportunity to defend his teaching and provide the Galatians with another tangible opportunity to demonstrate their friendship with Paul through another hospitable welcome. His arrival would allow the Galatians to yet again "become like Paul" (v. 12), "receive him as an angel" (v. 14), and "be zealous in a noble way" (v. 18). An apostolic parousia would make them hosts, people who obeyed the truth and practiced their faith through love (6:6–7). However, that moment would have to wait. For now, the Galatians would receive a letter, not the person.

For some reason, Paul decided to not travel in person back into Galatia, but to send an impassioned epistle to the Galatians. He articulates a desire to be with them, but makes no mention or promise of any actual plan.[86] Also of note, the letter to the Galatians does not identify a co-author or commend a courier, which suggests the letter arrived in Galatia without a Pauline representative.[87] The Galatians likely interpreted Paul's absence as a sign of his insincerity or lack of faithfulness. He faced a similar issue with the Corinthians (cf. 2 Cor 1:15–2:4), and the agitators could easily have leveraged Paul's absence to cast doubt about his character. The *lack* of travel could garner as much interpretation as actual travel.

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[86] The absence of a travelogue is curious because Paul did revisit Galatia (cf. Acts 16:6; 18:23; perhaps 1 Cor 16:1), and elsewhere Paul announced a personal visit to his letter recipients (Rom 15:28; 1 Cor 4:19; 16:5; 2 Cor 9:4; 12:14; 13:1; Phil 1:25; 2:24; 1 Thess 3:10; Phlm 22). The intensity of another crisis apparently demanded his presence elsewhere and precluded a return trip to Galatia. From this observation, commentators have speculated about the provenance and dating of Galatians. John Knox, "Galatians," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), 342–43 reads this as evidence that Paul wrote Galatians from prison after Romans; Martyn, *Galatians*, 426 presumes "the intensity of Paul's labors in some of the cities around the Aegean Sea" prevented Paul's trip to Galatia; Witherington, *Grace in Galatia*, 314 claims that Paul's crisis well suits "the time just *before* the apostolic council recorded in Acts 15." However, the absence of a proposed travelogue in Galatians hardly warrants such historical conjectures.

[87] On the form and function of Paul's ending (Gal 6:11–18), see Jeffrey A. D. Weima, *Neglected Endings: The Significance of the Pauline Letter Closings*, JSNTSS (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 158–59.

Paul seems aware of this social dynamic, and so explains his desire to speak with them in person instead of through a letter.[88] Ironically, Paul attributes apostolic import to his movement (Gal 1–2, 4:12–15), yet precludes the Galatians from reaching the correlated negative conclusion about his immobility.

Without immediate plans to visit Galatia, Paul found a way to circulate his message. He customarily intended for his letters to circulate broadly,[89] and this letter was addressed to multiple churches throughout the province of Galatia (ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις τῆς Γαλατίας, 1:2). Recent inscriptional discoveries indicate that Pamphylia was also located in the province of Galatia during Paul's visit,[90] so believers as far south as Perge and Attalia (Acts 13:13–14; 14:24–25) might have been among Paul's intended audience, along with the churches in Lycaonia This creates a broad geographical area for circulation. While the letter is evidence of Paul's *non*-travel, it nevertheless required some travel for distribution. The churches themselves might have assumed responsibility for copying and forwarding Paul's missive (cf. Col 4:16). In that case, the Galatians would have had an opportunity to embody the gospel and manifest the Spirit's activity by receiving a fellow believer bearing Paul's letter. This reconstruction relies on indirect evidence, but helps us consider the role of travel in the initial circulation and reception of Paul's letter.

Upon our analysis of travel in the text of Galatians 4:12–20 and its social background, we might draw two conclusions about the meaning of travel. One, mobility shaped the social identities of early Christians. How they were known was a function of movement. Mobility defined Paul as an individual. He was an απόστολος sent by God, yet persecuted and banished by opponents, and then welcomed as an itinerant host by the Galatians. The Galatians themselves were defined by their response to Paul's arrival. If history is a guide, we might consider that most of the "laity" or "simple Christians" in Galatia articulated their religious identity through social associations and hospitality encounters, which were proxies

[88] The phrase ἀλλάξαι τὴν φωνήν μου (4:20) can mean "change my [harsh] tone" (to be nicer) or "exchange my voice" (for another medium of communication). Most translations and commentators prefer the former. For a case in favor of the latter, see Betz, *Galatians*, 236, esp. fn. 179–82. In addition to Betz's point about the phrase being a common epistolary topos, another factor is its parallel infinitive phrase, "to be present with you."

[89] Smith, *Epistles for All Christians*, 37–46.

[90] Onur, "Two Procuratorian Inscriptions from Perge"; Mark Wilson, "The Denouement of Claudian Pamphylia-Lycia and Its Implications for the Audience of Galatians," *NovT* 60, no. 4 (2018): 337–60.

for theological alignments (cf. 2 John 10–11). Through travel, Paul and the Galatians (and the agitators!) developed and inhabited social identities. Two, travel also became a crucible for forging honor. Paul's recollection of travel in Gal 4:12–20 repeatedly evokes measures of status and worth reflected through travel. Despite Paul's physical stigma, the Galatians honored and esteemed him as one favored by God. Their positive reception both conferred status upon Paul and revealed their own character as people who granted honor according to an alternative, cruciform standard. Both parties derived the benefit of honor during Paul's arrival. The apostle's travel into Galatia produced social value and constructed social identities.

§3.3 Conclusion: The Theological Significance of Travel and Hospitality in Galatians

Paul's personal appeal in Gal 4:12–20 has been depicted as an emotional excursus detached from the preceding arguments (2:14–4:7) and subsequent allegory (4:21–31).[91] Burton, for example, sees Paul's train of thought veering off course: "dropping argument, . . . the apostle turns to appeal, begging the Galatians."[92] The purportedly irrational aside of Gal 4:12–20 has been (dis)regarded as "the result of Paul's emotional irritation."[93] Others have identified a more consistent rationale in the passage. Witherington observes here the "rhetorical force and persuasive power of an emotional appeal to experience."[94] Paul touches all the emotional bases to appeal to the Galatians' deeper emotions.[95] Betz sees Paul utilizing a string of Hellenistic topoi about "true friendship" to make a personal appeal for an intimate relationship.[96] These positive readings explain *how* Paul argues, but leave open the question of *why* Paul makes this personal argument within the letter. What was the theological significance of travel for Paul in light of his epistle's overall argument? How does Gal 4:12–20 fit Paul's theological vision?

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[91] The section certainly displays a rhetorical shift, from *logos* to *pathos*, from detached analysis to a personal remembrance in the first and second person. Gal 4:12–20 has 19 first-person references (11 verbs, 8 pronouns), 23 second-person references (9 verbs, 14 pronouns), and only three third-person references (in v. 17).

[92] Ernest De Witt Burton, *A Critical And Exegetical Commentary On The Epistle To The Galatians*, ICC (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), 235.

[93] Betz, *Galatians*, 220, characterizing the traditional interpretation.

[94] Witherington, *Grace in Galatia*, 304.

[95] Witherington, *Grace in Galatia*, 305–06 identifies "all the emotional stops" that Paul pulls out.

[96] Betz, *Galatians*, 221–37, passim.

The modernist tendency to grant primacy to theological discourse discounts the role of embodied actions such as travel and hospitality in Paul's thought. For ancients such as Paul, theology was not disembodied, Platonic ideas or esoteric exegetical readings.[97] Spiritual realities were embodied and articulated within a community. Ancient religion was communal praxis, not private thought.[98] Paul's travel and the Galatians' response must be situated within such a milieu. Longenecker explains, "Paul frequently presumes a profound interrelation between the physical and 'spiritual' dimensions of a society or community; the concrete world is the arena wherein the 'spiritual' temperament is lived out."[99] Social practices testify to and reinforce theological convictions, especially in Galatians.[100]

In the biographical introduction of Galatians (1:11–2:20), Paul illustrates how social interactions relate to theological realities. His discourse on "justification by faith" (2:11–20) stemmed from relational dysfunction around meals. In Paul's estimation, Peter's withdrawal from table fellowship undermined "the truth of the gospel" and invalidated "justification by faith." The referent behind such theological language was an embodied action—sitting at a table and eating next to certain people. In Gal 2, the utility of *dikai–* terminology was not expounding personal soteriology, but stimulating symbolic movement toward one another as an expression of unity and mutuality. The act of table fellowship enacted the theological reality of "justification." For Paul, the cross propelled new and honor-granting movements toward other people, such as commensality or hospitality. As Longenecker rightly notes, "[Paul's] understanding of their acceptance of him is rooted in an underlying theological conviction about the nature of Christian social behavior."[101] The traveler-host encounter reported in Gal 4:12–15 bore witness to three theological realities: God's new creation, the cross of Christ, and the Holy Spirit's presence.

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[97] Christoph Markschies, *Christian Theology and Its Institutions in the Early Roman Empire: Prolegomena to a History of Early Christian Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2015) traces how ideas develop from institutions and their communal practices.

[98] This is not to repeat the stereotype that Greco-Roman religion was only about cult rituals and that belief was uniquely Christian, but to note the peculiarly individiual and private nature of modern religious practice compared to antiquity. About the intersection of belief and cult in the ancient world, see Jacob L. Mackey, *Belief and Cult: Rethinking Roman Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022).

[99] Longenecker, *The Triumph of Abraham's God*, 43.

[100] On the role of ethics in Galatians, see Barclay, *Obeying the Truth*.

[101] Longenecker, *The Triumph of Abraham's God*, 159.

Paul's arrival and the Galatians' response fit within the broader theological vision cast throughout Paul's letter as a sign of God's new creation. In the argument of Galatians, Christ inaugurates the new age with communal and ethical implications (5:13–6:10).[102] Paul could hardly imagine that his converts could accept the crucifixion and the resultant new realm of existence without some moral transformation. For Paul, the initial hospitality was proof of a new divine reality and the Galatians' participation in it. Paul's argument in Galatians 4:12–20, as throughout his letter, goes beyond getting the Galatians back onto his side in the debate. They were to escape the old enslaving powers and operate within the new, post-resurrection creation, just as they did when Paul traveled to and appeared before them in person.

For Paul, the positive encounter demonstrated the Galatians' initial commitment to the truth of the gospel of Christ crucified. Considering Paul's physical condition upon arrival, the Galatians' positive hospitality demonstrated their acceptance of Paul's message about a crucified Messiah and its attendant cruciform values. If they esteemed the disfigured itinerant, the cross of Christ was not a stumbling block, but a focal point in their reworked social patterns.

The Galatians' welcome of Paul served as proof of the Holy Spirit in them. In Galatians, the manifestation of the Spirit was not foremost charismatic signs (cf. 1 Cor 12, 14), but the fruit of self-giving love and relational harmony in Christ (Gal 5:6–6:5). Their personal welcome of Paul (4:14–15) comes from the community-forming Spirit of God. Such self-giving, honor-granting love was an eschatological quality produced by the Spirit in the lives of people united with Christ. The Spirit produced in the Galatians an inclination to welcome a haggard traveler as a person worthy of welcome, a messenger sent from God.

The hospitality event prompted by Paul's travel carried soteriological significance.[103] The Galatians' hospitality toward the itinerant Paul embodied the social and moral transformation of believers participating in God's new creation, united with Christ, and filled with the Holy Spirit.

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[102] Martyn, *Galatians*, 97–105; Longenecker, *The Triumph of Abraham's God*, 35–67.

[103] Several early Christian texts link hospitality with salvation: Matt 25:31–46; Acts 10:1–11:19; 16:30–34; Jas 2:25; 2 John 10–12; 3 John 5–12; 1 Clem. 10:1–12:3.

Chapter 4. Philemon's Persona as a Host

Paul's epistle to Philemon came into existence because of specific travel events. A thumbnail sketch of the letter's background illustrates the degree to which travel spawned and shaped the situation. Onesimus' initial departure complicated his relationship with his master Philemon and drew Paul into the problem.[1] His travel generated the triangular relationship between Paul, Philemon, and Onesimus that defines the situation behind Phlm.[2] Onesimus' subsequent return to Philemon forms the immediate background for Paul's epistle. The letter of Phlm, our primary window into the events, was supplemental to the actual travel event of Onesimus' return. Phlm represents Paul's rhetorical attempt to shape perceptions of and responses to Onesimus' travel back to Philemon. Another purpose of Paul's letter was to promote a third travel event—Onesimus' return to him (Phlm 13–14). The succinct letter of Phlm bears witness to a cluster of socially-embedded travel events that shaped relations among distant Christians. Onesimus' physical movements, along with their contested interpretations, make Phlm a rich case study for analyzing the meaning of travel and how it shaped social identities within Paul's network.

§4.1 Introducing Travel in Phlm

Who was Philemon? Information about him is sparse, as his name is attested to only one time (Phlm 1). Statements in Paul's letter to Philemon imply that he hosted the local gathering of believers (v. 2), had at least one slave (vv. 11–16), and could accommodate Paul in his house (v. 22). Because these factors suggest a degree of wealth, scholars have characterized Philemon as a person of prominent means.[3] However, more than anything, Philemon has

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[1] The terms "departure" and "return" are used for Onesimus' two main journeys, as they do not imply a certain historical reconstruction, such as "escape" or "flee." Also, "Philemon" refers to the person, while the abbreviated "Phlm" refers to Paul's canonical letter to him.

[2] S. Scott Bartchy, "Philemon, Epistle To," in *ABD*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 305 identifies this triangular relationship as the letter's "single theme."

[3] E.g., Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 59–60, "Philemon himself ranks high at least on the dimension of wealth and on evaluation within the sect"; cf. David G. Horrell, "Farewell to Another Wealthy Patron? Reassessing Philemon in the Light of Recent Scholarly Discussion of Socio-Economic Level and Domestic Space," in *La Lettre À Philémon Et L'ecclésiologie Paulinienne*, ed. Daniel Marguerat, Benedictina 22 (Leuven: Peeters, 2016), 58–65, who notes that Philemon's social class has perhaps been

been understood, by virtue of his presumed ownership of Onesimus, as a slave master. The identities of both people have been essentialized based on this particular hierarchical arrangement—Philemon was a "master," and Onesimus was his "slave."[4] However, Paul's letter never refers to Philemon as a "master" (κύριος or δεσπότης) nor states his possession of a slave.[5] In fact, the letter presents Philemon in a rather favorable sense. He was a "beloved coworker" (v.1) who hosted fellow believers (v. 2, 22), had a love for the saints (vv. 5–7), could be trusted to respond rightly to a personnel request (vv. 8–21), and maintained translocal ties with other believers (vv. 22–25). This social profile of Philemon, even discounted for Paul's rhetoric, involves a greater degree of relationality and complexity than the conventional designation of "master." Philemon lived within multi-faceted social parameters. In the language of intersectionality, his identity would have been "constituted by mutually reinforcing vectors."[6] Such an observation about Philemon's social identity does not deny (or condone!) the historical fact that Philemon in all likelihood was an actual slave master who legally owned Onesimus.[7] However, recognizing Philemon's social multidimensionality decenters his essentialized identity as a "master," thus allowing for alternative reconstructions of his identity and roles within the Christian community. To rephrase Paul, Philemon is no longer just a master but more than a master.

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overestimated, so Philemon would have likely been more of a local businessperson rather than a regional magnate.

[4] For the history of interpretation of Phlm, see Larry J. Kreitzer, *Philemon* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008); D. Francois Tolmie, "Tendencies in the Research on the Letter of Philemon since 1980," in *Philemon in Perspective: Interpreting a Pauline Letter*, ed. D. Francois Tolmie (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 1–28; D. Francois Tolmie, *Pointing Out Persuasion in Philemon: Fifty Readings of Paul's Rhetoric from the Fourth to the Eighteenth Century* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021); Stephen E. Young, *Our Brother Beloved: Purpose and Community in Paul's Letter to Philemon* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2021), 23–60.

[5] The mention of γνώμη (v. 14), when translated as "consent" (NRSV), suggests that Philemon has control, perhaps ownership rights, over Onesimus. However, Paul had already indicated that Onesimus' fate did not depend upon Philemon (vv. 8–9), and so did not need "consent." Here in Phlm 14, the word has the sense of "counsel." The Latin Vulgate renders γνώμη as *consilio*. In 1 Cor 7:25 and 2 Cor 8:10, Paul gives his γνώμη, as in "opinion" or "advice."

[6] Jennifer C. Nash, "Re-Thinking Intersectionality," *Feminist Review* 89, no. 1 (2008): 2.

[7] Several publications have argued that Onesimus was actually not an enslaved person, but their arguments do not stand well. Ulrich Huttner, *Early Christianity in the Lycus Valley* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 104–09 proposes "that Onesimus should be categorized as a freedman rather than slave." However, Paul's wordplay ἄχρηστον/εὔχρηστον (v. 11) and "more than a slave" rhetoric (v. 16) together suggest that Onesimus was an actual slave. Allen Dwight Callahan, "Paul's Epistle to Philemon: Toward an Alternative Argumentum," *HTR* 86, no. 4 (1993): 357–76 proposes that Onesimus was Philemon's blood brother and that the language of "slave" was metaphorical. This view has not gained a scholarly following and is assessed in §5.3.

Because travel performs and creates ideological narratives that frame subject identities (§2.1.2), we might discern Philemon's social identity through the lens of travel. To restate the initial question: Who was Philemon in light of travel? This approach yields insights about both Philemon and his broader community of Christians, for travel played a critical role in Philemon's social relations and Paul's letters to him.

The next two chapters examine the mobile identities of two particular figures—Philemon (Ch. 4) and Onesimus (Ch. 5). A chapter focusing on Philemon's mobile identity might seem immaterial considering that he is a marginal figure in early Christianity and we do not have data for any of his travels. However, as this chapter shall establish, Philemon played a critical, even self-defining, role as a host who enabled the movements of others. So, for both Philemon and Onesimus, we ask: How did travel shape and define their social personas? Who were they within the community in light of travel realities? To address these questions, we explore some of the broader historical, social, and theological aspects of the pertinent travel events. Where and when did travel take place? What social realities and relationships enabled the travel? And, in turn, how did travel shape those relationships? What theological ideologies bore upon the interpretations of travel? These broader questions enable us to observe the significance and meaning of particular travel events within Paul's social network.

The next section (§4.2) establishes the locations of the actors and travel events reflected in Phlm. This provides the historical and geographical context for Chapters 4 and 5. The remainder of this chapter then explores Philemon's role in relation to itinerating Christians. We examine the meaning of "refreshed" in Phlm 7 (§4.3) and the social institution of πρόξενια (§4.4) to discern Philemon's role within Paul's network of Christians. Against that general backdrop, we explore the identity and effects of the Pauline guests who traveled to Philemon (§4.5). These sections together construct a portrait of Philemon as a host to Christian travelers, which points to broader patterns in the formative role of travel among early Christians.

§4.2 The Geographical Context of Phlm

The geographical setting of Phlm bears upon the meaning of travel in the letter. The physical location of Philemon and Paul contextualizes, both physically and socially, the movement of people between them. First, where was Philemon when Paul sent Onesimus with a letter to him? The text of Phlm offers no explicit evidence about its destination. Two clues do suggest that Philemon was in Asia—the name of Apphia appears frequently in the province of Asia[8] and the letter supposes prior visits from Pauline associates (vv. 23–24), who were active in Asia. This evidence is hardly decisive, but it hints toward Asia. The letter of Phlm is, however, closely associated with another letter addressed to Colossae (Col 1:2).[9] By linking details about three people mentioned in both Phlm and Col, we might locate Philemon's house church in the city of Colossae. Epaphras, who is from Colossae (Col 4:12), knows Philemon well enough to send greetings (Phlm 23); Archippus of Colossae was addressed in

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[8] Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke, *The Letter to Philemon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 254.

[9] Several factors weigh in favor of Pauline authorship of Colossians. One, prosopological evidence suggests that Col and Phlm were written simultaneously between groups of remarkable overlap. Both letters have the same author (Paul), co-author (Timothy), greeters (Epaphras, Aristarchus, Mark, Luke, Demas), addressee (Aristarchus), and letter-carrier (Onesimus). The crossover of these nine figures serves as a strong and intricate tie between the letters of Phlm and Col. Two, intertextuality suggests that Col was written by Paul around the mid-50s. E.P. Sanders noted a literary dependence between phrases in Col and the indisputable Pauline letters, which he interpreted as a later disciple imitating Paul's genuine letters ("Literary Dependence in Colossians," *JBL* 85, no. 1 [1966]: 28–45). However, the quotes might have resulted from Paul adapting his own retained copies. Of the fifteen echoes that Sanders identified, fourteen appear in 1 Cor, 2 Cor, or Rom—three letters written in the mid-50s. This literary connection would situate Col during, or close to, Paul's time in Ephesus. Three, the epistle's distinctive linguistic style and theological content do not automatically demonstrate pseudonymity. Factors besides pseudepigraphy better account for the distinctive elements in Col. For example, Paul was an intelligent and strategizing missionary whose thought changed based on contingent circumstances; Paul could have deliberately taken up an Asiatic style of Greek rhetoric; a co-author and/or amanuensis with whom Paul collaborated to compose the letter could also account for the distinctives. Also of note, Church Fathers, fluent in Greek and adept at ancient oratory, never questioned the authenticity of Col. Four, the denial of Pauline authorship faces a significant historical problem—namely, the lack of a plausible scenario for the creation of Col. If not Paul, who created Col? For what reason? And, when? Historical reconstructions for a pseudonymous letter are not derived from an historical analysis. Rather, the position first determines that Col is post-Pauline, then offers possible historical scenarios fitting that prior judgement. However, in light of the above points, the traditional view remains the most plausible reconstruction for the existence of Col. That is, Paul, along with Timothy, authored the letter and sent it to Colossae with Tychicus and Onesimus. These factors thus warrant using Col to supplement our reconstruction of Phlm. For a fuller argument in favor of Pauline authorship, see Campbell, *Framing Paul*, 260–309. Yet, even if Col was forged after Paul by someone using the names in Phlm to feign authenticity, the letter of Col demonstrates that early Christian memory located Epaphras, Archippus, and Onesimus in the city of Colossae. This means we can plausibly locate Onesimus and Philemon in Colossae regardless of the authenticity of Colossians. For a discussion on the authorial authenticity of Colossians and analysis of viewpoints, see Nijay Gupta, "What Is in a Name? The Hermeneutics of Authorship Analysis Concerning Colossians," *CBR* 11, no. 2 (2013): 196–217.

both letters (Col 4:17; Phlm 2); and, most convincing, Onesimus himself came from and returned to Colossae (Col 4:9; Phlm 15, 17). The evidence overall favors Colossae, and counterproposals for other locations are unattested. For this reason, this work follows the general consensus that Philemon and Onesimus were from Colossae in the Lycus Valley

The more complicated issue relates to the provenance of Phlm. Paul composed Phlm while imprisoned (vv. 1, 9–10, 13, 22, 23).[10] But from which city? This question about Paul's location has been a "great bone of contention among commentators."[11] Based largely on information from Acts, three cities have been suggested: Ephesus (ca. 52–55 CE; Acts 19:1–20:1), Caesarea (ca. 58–60 CE; Acts 24:27), and Rome (ca. 60–62 CE; Acts 28:17–31).[12]

Rome has traditionally been identified as the city of origin, for two reasons. One, ecclesiastical tradition attributes Phlm to Rome.[13] Subscripts in fourth and fifth-century manuscripts of Phlm include, "written from Rome."[14] John Chrysostom and Jerome believed Phlm was written from Rome. Two, because we lack firm evidence of any Ephesian imprisonment, only Rome (Acts 28:16, 30) and Caesarea (Acts 24:27) stand as viable options for the Prison Epistles. However, these two factors are not definitive. A fourth-century tradition in favor of Rome is rather late[15] and may reflect political claims of the imperial capital more than reliable history.[16] Moreover, an Ephesian incarceration seems likely. Paul speaks twice of multiple imprisonments (ἐν φυλακαῖς, 2 Cor 6:5; 11:24) and makes a general reference to his afflictions in the city of Ephesus (1 Cor 15:32) and its region Asia (2 Cor

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[10] Philemon is widely regarded as a genuinely Pauline letter. The notable exception to the consensus is F. C. Baur, *Paul, the Apostle of Jesus Christ*, vol. II (London; Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1875), 80–84, which regards the letter as a yet-unfinished "Christian romance serving to convey a genuine Christian idea."

[11] James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 307.

[12] Kreitzer, *Philemon*, 3, fn. 5 catalogs the advocates who favor Rome (18 commentators), Ephesus (20), and Caesarea (7).

[13] John T. Curran, "Tradition and the Roman Origin of the Captivity Letters," *TS* 5 (1945): 163–205.

[14] K L 048 TR; Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1975), 658–59.

[15] The Marcionite prologue to Philemon did say that Paul wrote from Rome, but its historical value is questioned. Interestingly, that source claimed that Col and Eph, two other Prison Epistles, were written from Ephesus.

[16] In a similar fashion, church leaders in competing metropolises regarded the graves of apostles as sources of authority; see Eus., *HE* 2.24, 3.31, 5.24; also, David L. Eastman, *The Many Deaths of Peter and Paul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 35–37.

1:8–10). Also, in Romans, Paul refers to "fellow prisoners" (συναιχμάλωτοι, 16:17), people with whom he was once imprisoned.[17] The timing of Paul's autobiographical remarks is important. For one, all these mentions were made *before* his imprisonments in Caesarea and Rome and *during* (or just following) his Ephesian ministry. Early secondary witnesses about Paul also allow for an Ephesian imprisonment. Luke reports a tumultuous time in Ephesus (Acts 19:11–40) and Clement mentions that Paul "had been seven times in chains" (1 Clem 5:6). These latter references enhance the plausibility of an Ephesian imprisonment. Overall, the reasons for thinking that Paul wrote Phlm from Rome are questionable.

In 1908 Adolf Deissmann argued for an Ephesian provenance for Paul's Prison Epistles,[18] and the theory has gained steady support since.[19] The argument for an Ephesian provenance rests on several travel-related considerations.[20] Most notable is the geographical proximity of Ephesus to Colossae. The 171-kilometer journey up the Meander River Valley required 5.7 days on foot. In contrast, the journey from Rome was 1,906 kilometers and required 16.2 days when sailing, while the 2,677-kilometer land route required 90.6 days.[21] Commentators question whether a slave could manage and afford to travel all the way from Colossae to Rome. The geographical location becomes even more of a consideration when we take into account the full number of travel events between Colossae and Paul's location. The text of Phlm presupposes the following trips:

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[17] Ryan S. Schellenberg, "The Rest of Paul's Imprisonments," *JTS* 69, no. 2 (2018): 536.

[18] Adolf Deissmann, *Light From the Ancient East*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1978), 237–38.

[19] For recent treatments, see Heike Omerzu, "Spurensuche: Apostelgeschichte und Paulusbriefe als Zeugnisse einer ephesischen Gefangschaft des Paulus," in *Die Apostelgeschichte im Kontext antiker und frühchristlicher Historiographie*, ed. Jorg Frey, Clare K. Rothschild, and Jens Schroter, BZNW 162 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 295–315; Joel White, "The Imprisonment That Could Have Happened (and the Letters Paul Could Have Written There): A Response to Ben Witherington," *JETS* 61, no. 3 (2018): 549–58.

[20] M. Eugene Boring, "Philippians and Philemon: Date and Provenance," *CBQ* 81, no. 3 (2019): 470–94 argues for an Ephesian provenance of Philemon (and Philippians) based on the letter's projected "narrative world" and linguistic patterns within the letters. Such stylometric analysis of internal elements, akin to those employed to dispute Pauline authorship of Colossians, seems too subjective for historical reconstruction. For this reason, I consider the external favors related to travel.

[21] Figures from ORBIS (https://orbis.stanford.edu/, referenced Oct 30, 2021).

1. Epaphras traveled from Colossae to Paul, where he became a Pauline associate.[22]
2. Epaphras traveled back to Colossae, when he founded the churches (Col 1:7; 4:13).
3. Epaphras traveled to Paul again, when he reports on the Colossian church (Col 1:8) and sends his greetings back to Colossae (Col 4:12; Phlm 23).
4. Pauline associates traveled to Colossae; they encountered Philemon, and Onesimus perhaps learned about Paul's status and location.
5. Pauline associates traveled back to Paul, when they report about Philemon (Phlm 5–7) and send their greetings to Philemon (Phlm 24; see also Col 4:10–14).
6. Onesimus traveled to Paul from Colossae (Phlm 15).
7. Onesimus traveled back to Colossae, sent by Paul (Phlm 12) with Tychicus (Col 4:9).

Paul also anticipated several future trips. The ease with which he refers to possible journeys indicates that the trip was feasible in his mind, suggesting a shorter distance.

1. Onesimus might travel to Paul again (Phlm 13–14).
2. Paul might travel to Philemon, as hoped for after his release (Phlm 22).
3. Mark might travel to Colossae (Col 4:10).[23]

On this count, the texts of Philemon and Colossians indicate (at least) ten trips between Paul's locale and the city of Colossae.[24] The fact that people could contemplate, let alone execute, this number of journeys between Colossae and distant Rome seems implausible. Considering the costs, timing, and logistics of ancient travel, the intensive

[22] For the case that Epaphras was converted and formed as a missionary by Paul in Ephesus, see Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul*, 234–36. Epaphras' first travel to Paul does not have to be to the same place from whence Paul writes.

[23] As with Epaphras' travel, Mark need not be coming from Paul's location, though the fact that he sends greetings to the Colossians suggests that he was alongside Paul. Even if Mark was not with Paul, he was close enough for Paul to know about his potential travels to Colossae.

[24] Information also passed between the community: Philemon knew about Paul's location (discussed below), and the Colossians had received instructions about Mark (Col 4:10). Such information could have been transmitted on the listed trips, so it is not listed as evidence of additional trips. The personal nature of that information reveals the interconnected bonds between the communities, which would have been harder to sustain if Paul were in Rome.

intercommunication witnessed between the two locales suggests that Paul was located somewhere close to Colossae, such as Ephesus.[25]

Paul's request for hospitality (Phlm 22) provides two more points in favor of an Ephesian provenance. One, Paul's plan to visit Philemon in Colossae fits better within the context of his Ephesian ministry than his Roman captivity. From the imperial capital of Rome, Paul desired to continue west to Spain (Rom 15:24, 28). Returning east from Rome to visit the inland city of Colossae contradicts that intention. However, Acts 19:8–10, along with the Corinthian correspondence, depicts Paul's extended stay in Ephesus as a period of extensive travel to "all the residents of Asia." In tracking the development of Paul's geographic focus, a visit to Colossae best aligns with his strategy when located in Ephesus, not in Rome. The ministry itinerations of Paul's associates to Colossae (listed above) likewise fit better in the Ephesus-based period of regional ministry than Paul's Roman imprisonment, in terms of both logistical feasibility and strategic alignment. Two, Paul's request for hospitality in v. 22 suggests that he would visit soon, perhaps in a few days. The implied imminence of his visit to Philemon suggests that Paul was detained close to Philemon.

Prosopological evidence, albeit limited, also points toward an Ephesian provenance. Timothy co-authored Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon, and so was present with Paul at the time and place of composition. Timothy did actively travel between Ephesus and Corinth during the early 50s (Acts 19:22; 20:24; Rom 16:21; 1 Cor 4:17; 16:10), and later texts place him in Ephesus (1 Tim 1:3; 2 Tim 1:18; 4:12). However, no evidence indicates that Timothy accompanied Paul to Rome. A certain Aristarchus was also present with Paul to send his greetings (Phlm 24; Col 4:10). Acts mentions an Aristarchus from Thessalonica who

[25] Campbell, *Framing Paul*, 256–76 has proposed Apamea (or some other Phrygian town) as the place from which Paul wrote Phlm, Col, and Eph. After establishing that Paul must be close (based on Phlm 22), Campbell argues against Ephesus, as Paul does not send greetings from local brothers and so must not be in a town with an established mission. However, this must be recognized as an argument from silence. A better explanation for the included names is that those people had visited and met the church(es) in Colossae. In his second move, Campbell argues that Paul wrote from somewhere east of Colossae, such as Apamea, because the sequence of cities in Col 4:13–16 reflects Paul's east-to-west travel itinerary. However, Campbell's claim of "three primary sequences" overplays the evidence; only one verse (4:13) has a threefold sequence. A better explanation for why Colossae appears first is simply that Paul was writing this letter to the Colossians (and so actually says "you," not "those in Colossae") and that he is discussing the sequence of Epaphras' past ministry (not his own upcoming travel itinerary).

accompanied Paul during his time in Ephesus (19:29; 20:5).[26] These two Pauline associates who greeted Philemon were present in Ephesus, but never appear in Rome. This further supports an Ephesian provenance for Phlm.

In light of these considerations, the balance of evidence favors the notion that Paul wrote his letter from Ephesus to Philemon in Colossae, probably in the early 50s CE. This reconstruction forms the geographical and historical context for the following analyses of Philemon, Onesimus, and their communities in light of travel.

§4.3 Philemon "Refreshing" the Saints

For both Paul the author and subsequent interpreters of Phlm, the travel events that receive the bulk of attention are Onesimus' departure and subsequent return. Yet, the letter itself implies prior travel events between Pauline associates and the church in Colossae. Those past mobilities established the necessary travel network and relational connectivity that enabled Onesimus' movement. Moreover, those past travel events formed the social context for Philemon's role and even constituted his subjectivity within the local community of believers. The nature of the travel events that occurred *before* Onesimus' departure from Colossae illuminates Philemon's persona within the early Christian network. In light of Paul's comments and other contextual factors regarding travel, how did Philemon function in relation to other Christians?

In Phlm 7 Paul commends Philemon, saying "the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you" (τὰ σπλάγχνα τῶν ἁγίων ἀναπέπαυται διὰ σοῦ). This action appears to have been significant. Not only was it known to Paul in prison, but it merited public commendation. What did Philemon do that "refreshed" others? To what actual behavior does Paul's language refer?

[26] Aristarchus boarded the ship in Caesarea with Paul (Acts 27:2), but the text does not indicate that Aristarchus transferred with Paul in Myra onto the ship sailing to Italy (Acts 27:6). Perhaps he remained on board the original ship destined for Adramyttium, a port city in the Troad from which he could easily cross the Aegean to return home to Thessalonica. This explains why Acts mentions only his place of origin, "a Macedonian from Thessalonica."

The perfect tense of the verb (ἀναπέπαυται) could imply a continual activity[27] or particular deed[28] and thus has elicited a range of interpretations. John Chrysostom believed Philemon had performed general acts of benevolence; he helped "others who are in affliction."[29] Young read the words even more broadly, as a synonym for Philemon's general love toward Christians.[30] Scott argued for a more specific referent— after the earthquake of 60 AD, Philemon provided material assistance that benefited the entire church at Colossae.[31] Dunn suggested that Philemon was as a "fellow worker" (v. 2) engaged in a broader teaching ministry that nourished several churches.[32] Historical reconstructions have been diverse and admittedly conjectural. Commentators thus conclude that we can know only the *effect* of Philemon's action and not the *particular deed* that he performed.[33] However, the linguistic and contextual evidence suggests that ἀναπαύω in Phlm 7, does in fact, refer to a particular action performed by Philemon.

The verb ἀναπαύω generally means to "rest" or "relax."[34] The principal idea is a season of relief after some strenuous activity. The tired person is afforded a reprieve to recover and regain strength (Matt 11:28). In the LXX, people rest from their manual labor (Ex 23:12; Duet 5:14; Isa 14:3; Sir 34:3; Lam 5:5; Est 9:17; Philo, *Cher.* 87), enemy attacks (2 Kg 7:11; 1 Chron 22:9; Est 9:16, 22), and even life itself (Sir 22:11; 38:23; 47:23; Dan 12:13). In Greek histories, the term became "almost a technical expression for the resting of soldiers."[35]

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[27] Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 396 views Philemon's "refreshment" as general distinctive behavior; so, here, Paul draws attention to the lasting, continuing effects of Philemon's general ministry.

[28] George B. Caird, *Paul's Letters from Prison: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon in the Revised Standard Version*, New Claredon Bible (London: Oxford University Press, 1977), 220 notes that the perfect tense likely "points to some conspicuous act of generosity rather than to continual kindness"; Eduard Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1988), 195 agrees that Paul "has learned of one particular deed by which the community has helped the community."

[29] *PG* 62.709 (#780); ET: *NPNF* vol. 13, p. 550.

[30] Young, *Our Brother Beloved*, 109, 137.

[31] E. F. Scott, *The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians, to Philemon and to the Ephesians*, Moffatt NT Commentary (London: Harper & Brothers, 1930), 105–06.

[32] Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon*.

[33] Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians-Philemon*, WBC (Waco, TX: Thomas Nelson, 1982), 288; Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon*, 321; Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, 195–96; Kreitzer, *Philemon*, 21.

[34] S.v. ἀναπαύω, BDAG. The verb can be transitive or intransitive (Mk 6:31; 14:41; Lk 12:19; Rev 6:11; 14:13).

[35] Marvin R. Vincent, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Philippians and to Philemon* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1897), 181; see Plut., *Aem.* 15.5; Arrian., *Anab.* 2.8.2; 3.7.5; 3.9.1; Josephus, *J.W.* 3.178; 7.123.

Refreshment meant pausing from fighting to sit or sleep. The fact that ἀναπαύω implies reprieve from strenuous activity renders implausible most prior interpretations of the word in Phlm 7, such as benevolence, earthquake relief, or teaching ministry. The word's general meaning suggests that the saints had been weary from some taxing effort, then restored through Philemon's assistance. The term applied to respite after a rather broad range of tiring activities, such as work or battle, but also travel. In his exhortation for self-reliance, Epictetus refers to a traveler who receives "refreshment" in a foreign community—"And shall it be necessary for our philosopher, forsooth, when he goes abroad, to depend upon others for his assurance and his refreshment, instead of taking care of himself?" (τὸν δὲ φιλόσοφον ἡμῖν δεήσει ἄλλοις θαρροῦντα καὶ ἐπαναπαυόμενον ἀποδημεῖν καὶ μὴ ἐπιμελεῖσθαι αὐτὸν αὐτοῦ; *Diss.* 1.9.9). This sense of refreshment after travel (i.e., hospitality) is a common usage of ἀναπαύω in early Christian texts, particularly the letters of Paul and Ignatius.[36]

The Pauline corpus contains four occurrences of the verb ἀναπαύω (1 Cor 16:18; 2 Cor 7:13; Phlm 7, 20) plus the *hapax legomenon* συναναπαύω (Rom 15:32). Supposing a mid-50s date for 1 Cor, Rom, and Phlm, all five instances occur in a short window while Paul was managing the travel logistics with distant churches. In 2 Cor 7:13, Paul esteemed the Corinthians because Titus' spirit was "refreshed by all of you." The verse closely mirrors Phlm 7 (Figure 4.1). In both instances, (1) Paul notes his affective response of joy and encouragement (χαρ- and παράκλησις), which followed (2) a precipitating event noted by an ἐπὶ + dative clause. Then (3) ὅτι introduces a subordinate clause of reason, with (4) the perfect passive verb ἀναπέπαυται[37], (5) an abstract object in the accusative case (6) with genitive of possession, and (7) the subject expressed through a prepositional phrase.

The notable similarities of these verses, in terms of specific vocabulary, grammar, and logical reasoning, suggest that they address a similar socio-historical situation.[38] In the case of 2 Cor 7:13, "refresh" refers to the gracious manner in which the Corinthian church received, hosted,

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[36] My review of 323 instances of the ἀναπαύ- root in classical Greek literature noted no other instances of travel and hospitality among friends. The verb ἀναπαύω did appear in second-century apocryphal acts for domestic hospitality (*Acts of Paul* 3.4; 3.13; *Acts of Peter* 22), though between local acquaintances.
[37] Of the seven identified elements, the only sequential difference is the primary verb ἀναπέπαυται, which precedes the grammatical subject in 2 Cor 7:13, but follows "the hearts of the saints" in Phlm 7.
[38] Commentators have cited this parallel, but do not explore its exegetical value; e.g., Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon*, 321; Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, 195.

and returned Titus as he traveled to and from Corinth. The parallels suggest that Philemon has likewise "refreshed" Christian itinerants by supporting their travel efforts.

Structure	2 Cor 7:13	Phlm 7
1. Paul's affective response	Ἐπὶ δὲ τῇ παρακλήσει ἡμῶν περισσοτέρως μᾶλλον ἐχάρημεν	χαρὰν γὰρ πολλὴν ἔσχον καὶ παράκλησιν
2. Precipitating event	ἐπὶ τῇ χαρᾷ Τίτου,	ἐπὶ τῇ ἀγάπῃ σου,
3. Causal conjunctive	ὅτι	ὅτι
4a. Perfect passive verb	ἀναπέπαυται	——
5. Abstract object	τὸ πνεῦμα	τὰ σπλάγχνα
6. Possessive genitive	αὐτοῦ	τῶν ἁγίων
4b. Perfect passive verb	——	ἀναπέπαυται
7. Subject in preposition	ἀπὸ πάντων ὑμῶν	διὰ σοῦ

Figure 4.1. Comparison of 2 Cor 7:13 and Phlm 7b

In Romans 15:32, Paul outlined his travel plans to Rome, then requested prayer that "I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company" (συναναπαύσωμαι ὑμῖν). Paul had already discussed his anticipated travel to Rome and his expectation that the Roman Christians would assist him en route to Spain (Rom 1:10; 15:24).[39] The ἀναπαυ- root, in the context of Paul's anticipated visit to Rome, meant providing social and material support to a Christian itinerant.

The internal argument of Philemon adds further support to this reading of ἀναπαύω, which Paul repeats in Phlm 20b. At the closing of his plea, Paul requests, of Philemon, "refresh my heart in Christ" (ἀνάπαυσόν μου τὰ σπλάγχνα ἐν Χριστῷ). This hortatory imperative clarifies the favor Paul just requested of Philemon, "I want some benefit from you in the Lord" (v 20a). Commentators assume that Paul himself would be the beneficiary of Philemon's response. The benefit that Paul derives could come from Onesimus' personal return to Paul[40]

[39] Jewett, *Romans*, 938 reads "refresh" as resolution from ethnic strife. The unity of house and tenement churches in Rome surely affected how they received Paul into their midst, but does not preclude the obvious physical requirements of aiding the traveling apostle as he launched his Spanish mission from Rome, as Jewett emphasizes in his own reconstruction of Romans (pp. 74–91).
[40] Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, 205.

or from the news that Philemon has indeed welcomed back Onesimus.[41] However, Paul had earlier claimed Onesimus as "my heart" (τοῦτ' ἔστιν τὰ ἐμὰ σπλάγχνα; v. 12). In that light, Paul's comments in v. 20b make Onesimus the more likely recipient of Philemon's "refreshment." This reiterates his prior imperative for Philemon to "welcome" Onesimus (προσλαβοῦ αὐτὸν, v. 17).[42] Philemon would benefit Paul and refresh his heart in his charitable and hospitable response to Onesimus, who *is* Paul's heart.[43]

In 1 Cor 16:18, Paul reports that Stephanas' household has refreshed Paul's spirit as well as the Corinthians' (ἀνέπαυσαν γὰρ τὸ ἐμὸν πνεῦμα καὶ τὸ ὑμῶν). By bringing a certain message or being relationally present, they affected the people to whom they moved. In this instance, "refreshment" occurred when one person travels to help another person in need. The word implies bringing material and emotional support to distressed people. Amidst the imprisonments (2 Cor 6:5; 11:23), hostile enemies (1 Cor 15:32), and general ministry burdens Paul faced in Ephesus, the arrival of these three brothers spiritually encouraged him, or "raised his spirits."[44] Unlike the other four Pauline occurrences of ἀναπαύω, its use here in 1 Cor 16:18 differs in that the traveling visitor refreshes the host. Yet, the context remains inter-community travel among Christians.

About one generation after Paul, Ignatius of Antioch likewise used the verb ἀναπαύω when reporting on how the Christians of Asia Minor had assisted him when he traveled in the same area as a Roman prisoner. While being hosted by the Smyrnean church, Ignatius wrote to the church in Tralles, "I greet you from Smyrna together with the churches of God that are present with me, people who have refreshed me in every respect, physically as well as spiritually" (οἳ κατὰ πάντα με ἀνέπαυσαν σαρκί τε καὶ πνεύματι; *Trall.* 12:1). He affirmed that it was proper for the Roman church to "refresh" other believers coming to them from Syria (*Rom.* 10.2). Also, the Smyrneans "did well to welcome" the Syrian deacons Philo and

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[41] Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon*, 341.

[42] The verb προσλαμβάνω refers to the host's initial reception of someone into one's home, and thus functions as a synonym for ἀναπαύω by referring to hospitality (2 Macc. 10:25; Acts 28:2). See Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 131. For readings of the verb in light of papyrological evidence, see Zachary J. Cole, "Illustrating a Pauline Imperative (Phlm. 17): Προσλαμβάνω in P.Mur. 2.115," *JSNT* 45, no. 2 (2022): 177–92.

[43] Young, *Our Brother Beloved*, 157.

[44] Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 1341.

Rhaius when they "refreshed them in every way" (*Smyrn*. 10.1–2). In these instances, Ignatius used ἀναπαύω to speak of the hospitality that communities extended to Christian travelers. The particular phrase "refreshed in every way" was his language for hospitality toward socio-physically dislocated Christians. The fact that Ignatius used the term with audiences in multiple cities suggests that this sense of ἀναπαύω had become a feature of early Christian idiolect. If Ignatius' use of ἀναπαύω deliberately echoed Paul's language from 2 Cor 7:13 and Phlm 7 and 20, this suggests that an early Pauline reader employed the language to describe travel interactions. Yet, if Ignatius' language did not come from Paul, it nevertheless provides an independent witness among early Christians for ἀναπαύω to mean hospitality toward travelers.

Paul, like Ignatius after him, consistently uses the ἀναπαύ- root in the context of intercity travel. In their uses, ἀναπαύω refers to concrete acts of assistance to socio-physically dislocated individuals and thus functions as a semi-technical term for hospitality. The verb implies physical movement and specifically refers to a restorative interaction between the traveler and the host. In that light, it seems best to read Paul's statement in Phlm 7 as a reference to Philemon's specific acts of hospitality to Christian travelers. He refreshed the saints by providing relief in the form of hospitality to traveling visitors. The fact that a distant captive (Paul) knew about Philemon's ability to host (cf. Phlm 2, 22) suggests that he was well known for that quality, indicating that his acts of hospitality were likely regular and public.

This interpretation of ἀναπαύω as hospitality toward travelers in Phlm 7 aligns with Paul's socio-rhetorical purposes in writing to Philemon. The opening thanksgiving foregrounds Philemon's public reputation as a regular host to Christian travelers, applying implicit pressure upon Philemon to maintain that reputation for welcoming others.[45] Paul wanted Philemon, the host in Colossae, to continue his reputable ministry of "refreshing the saints" by "welcoming" (v. 17) and "refreshing" (v. 20) one more person traveling in his direction—namely, Onesimus. Paul's request in the letter "puts Philemon's proven track record of

[45] Jeffrey A. D. Weima, "Paul's Persuasive Prose: An Epistolary Analysis of the Letter to Philemon," in *Philemon in Perspective: Interpreting a Pauline Letter*, ed. D. Francois Tolmie (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 29–60. On Paul's method of rhetorically pressuring, and thus public shaming, see Lau, *Defending Shame*, 140–47. In 2 Cor 7–9, Paul applied a similar rhetorical strategy of "pre-boasting" to compel the Corinthians to extend generous hospitality toward Titus, the two brothers, and the Macedonian Christians.

refreshing hearts to the test: Will he be willing to refresh Paul's heart if this heart now comes to him in the form of his enslaved person Onesimus?"[46] Phlm 7 deliberately amplifies Philemon's reputation as someone who welcomes traveling Christians moving into his presence. The commendation lays the groundwork for his main request on behalf of Onesimus. Linguistic, exegetical, and rhetorical considerations indicate that ἀναπαύω in Phlm 7 refers to Philemon's acts of hospitality to Christian travelers. An observation about the historical geography of Colossae lends further support to this reading.

The geographic position of Colossae influenced early Christian travel to the city, including the events of Phlm. The Lycus Valley, in which Colossae sits, maintained political prominence throughout the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman periods because of its strategic location at the intersection of two major travel routes across Asia Minor. The area was a node of international communication. In the Roman Imperial era, the primary north-south route through Asia ran from Pergamum through the Lycus Valley until Side in Pamphylia.[47] Constructed by the Roman *proconsul* Manius Aquillus (129–126 BCE) to facilitate Roman administration over former Attalid territories,[48] this inland route expedited movement through the province of Asia. The principal east-west route ran from the Aegean coast toward Mesopotamia. Travelers would follow the Meander Valley from the coastal cities of Miletus or Ephesus through the Lycus Valley toward Iconium in the Anatolian plateau and then into Syria. These two routes intersected through the Lycus Valley (see Figure 4.2). Thus, residents of the principal cities of Laodicea, Colossae, Hierapolis, and Tripolis encountered foreign travelers from all four directions. The geographical location of the Lycus Valley cities at a strategic node made their residents, including the nascent Christian community, accessible to travelers. These geographical dynamics also shaped the work and legacy of Papias. About one generation after Philemon, Papias of Hierapolis collated oral traditions from Christians passing through his city.[49] The length of Papias' five-volume published work and the number

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[46] Young, *Our Brother Beloved*, 120.

[47] David French, "Pre-and Early-Roman Roads of Asia Minor," *Iran: Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies* 36, no. 1 (1998): 15–43.

[48] Stephen Mitchell, "The Administration of Roman Asia from 133 BC to AD 250," in *Lokale Autonomie und Ordnungsmacht in den kaiserzeitlichen Provinzen* (Munich: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 1999), 17–20.

[49] Fragments of Papias 3.4, from Eusebius, *HE*3.39. "And again, on any occasion when a person came (in my way) who had been a follower of the Elders, I would inquire about the discourses of the elders" (trans., Lightfoot LCL).

of apostolic followers he encountered suggest that a significant number of Christians visited him in Hierapolis. Plus, his work's subsequent influence in early Christian circles[50] indicates that travelers broadly disseminated Papias' book from Hierapolis. In terms of historical geography, the life of Papias offers a parallel to Philemon. Both men were prominent Christian leaders in the Lycus Valley whose ministry was predicated upon travelers passing through their city.

Figure 4.2. Map of Asia with Colossae and Main Roads[51]

Historical geography made Colossae a node of travel activity. Travelers through the region required hospitality, and we know of a particular individual in Colossae named Philemon who was capable of aiding travelers. Paul's language of ἀναπαύω (Phlm 7, 20) and other

[50] Bart D. Ehrman, trans., *The Apostolic Fathers: Volume II.*, LCL (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 87; cf. Stephen C. Carlson, *Papias of Hierapolis Exposition of Dominical Oracles: The Fragments, Testimonia, and Reception of a Second-Century Commentator* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

[51] The base map is "Asia Minor in the 2nd century AD" (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Asia_Minor_in_the_2nd_century_AD_-_general_map_-_Roman_provinces_under_Trajan_-_bleached_-_English_legend.jpg, accessed April 7, 2023), with the author's additions of the city "Colossae" and black lines showing the primary Roman roads intersecting in the Lycus Valley.

circumstantial factors suggest that Philemon was an affluent person known for assisting Christian travelers moving through Colossae. The fact of his hospitality elicits questions about the nature of his relationship with the travelers. What benefits were exchanged? On what terms? How was Philemon perceived by others in the community? To probe the nature and effects of Philemon's assistance to travelers, I draw upon the ancient Greek practice of πρόξενια.

§4.4 Philemon as a πρόξενος-Like Host

To overcome the dangers and expenses of travel in the ancient world, Greek cities developed a social institution called πρόξενια, roughly translated as "public guest-friendship." This honorific institution structured relations and facilitated travel between members of different Greek poleis. To formalize the long-distance guest-friendship, people in one community would bestow the honorific title of πρόξενος ("public host") upon a prominent person in another community who would host them.[52] The grantee of the title πρόξενος was always a stranger in a distant city.[53] When people from the granting community traveled to that city, the local πρόξενος provided support and intermediary services. Such assistance included physical accommodation, material support, and legal protections, along with social access to city administrators. πρόξενοι were εὐεργέται who hosted travelers.[54] Socio-physically dislocated travelers relied upon πρόξενοι when traveling, trading, and residing in a foreign city.

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[52] For an explanation and analysis of the institution, see Paul Monceaux, *Les Proxenies Grecques* (Paris: E. Thorin, 1886); Fritz Gschnitzer, "Proxenos," in *RE Suppl. XIII*, 1973; Phillippe Gauthier, *Les cités grecques et leurs bienfaiteurs* (Paris: École française d'Athènes, 1985), 131–49; M. B. Wallace, "Early Greek 'Proxenoi,'" *Phoenix* 24, no. 3 (1970): 189–208; Christian Marek, *Die Proxenie* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1984); Herman, *Ritualised Friendship*, 130–42; Bradley Hudson McLean, *An Introduction to Greek Epigraphy of the Hellenistic and Roman Periods from Alexander the Great Down to the Reign of Constantine (323 B.C.-A.D. 337)* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 233–36; William Mack, *Proxeny and Polis: Institutional Networks in the Ancient Greek World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). My summary draws mostly from Mack's monograph, the most recent and helpful analysis of the institution's honorific and functional aspects.

[53] Herman, *Ritualised Friendship*, 130. The decrees always mention the recipient's *ethnikos*.

[54] Greeks viewed πρόξενια as a type of ευεργεσία relationship. Granting communities often named their remote partners both εὐεργέται and πρόξενοι (e.g., *IG* I^3 110; *I.Eph* 1459). Both titles evoked an asymmetrical, reciprocal relationship. However, πρόξενος was a specialized subcategory of εὐεργέτης that occurred only in the specific context of travel.

Greek communities invested considerable resources into their πρόξενος relationships because of the essential benefits derived from them when traveling. An estimated 1.2 million πρόξενος grants were decreed from the archaic to the Roman Imperial periods.[55] Thus, πρόξενια was "by far the most copiously documented political institution in antiquity."[56] As a result, the social institution was widely practiced and well-known in antiquity as a template for relations between a local host and visiting travelers.

Despite the costs and effort required to host travelers, πρόξενοι gained significantly from the arrangement. The pursuit of status and prestige recurs through all πρόξενια-relationships.[57] In the context of elite competition, πρόξενοι were at once obliged and eager to perform such diplomatic functions to acquire honor. A grant of πρόξενος confirmed the grantee's status as an influential and connected citizen of their own community, as it often recognized the person for some prior benefaction.[58] The πρόξενος received various symbolic honors, such as titles, public inscriptions, and legal privileges including immunity (ἀσυλία) or citizenship (πολιτεία) in the granting community.[59] Relationships of πρόξενια set in motion a cycle for generating future honor. Once established, the relationship fostered travel, which provided the πρόξενος with regular opportunities to extend hospitality benefits to visitors. In hosting foreign guests, πρόξενοι fostered connections and accumulated status for bridging the chasm between people of two different communities.[60] The public institution melded the social values of honor and hospitality to facilitate travel between communities.

The ancient institution of πρόξενος offers a social model for reconstructing the role of early Christian host-leaders, such as Philemon.[61] Though early Christians never granted the official title of πρόξενος to a fellow believer, the implicit social logic of πρόξενια shaped relations between itinerants and their hosts. We can distinguish between the official title of πρόξενος and the general role of someone like Philemon who mediated πρόξενος-like services such as

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[55] The figures are from Mack, *Proxeny and Polis*, 2, 15; for a catalogue of the *proxenoi*, including their ethnics, locations, and benefits, see Marek, *Die Proxenie*, 5–118.
[56] Herman, *Ritualised Friendship*, 130; he also keenly compares the decrees to marriage certificates in that both reduce a complex relationship to a banal formula (p. 138).
[57] Mack, *Proxeny and Polis*, 90.
[58] Mack, *Proxeny and Polis*, 113.
[59] For examples of the various honors accorded, see McLean, *Greek Epigraphy*, 234–5.
[60] Mack, *Proxeny and Polis*, 147.
[61] To my knowledge, the only NT scholar to discuss πρόξενια has been Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 22–23.

hospitality and social access to travelers from another community. This well-placed individual maintained an ongoing commitment to ensuring the welfare of foreign travelers, and thus functioned like a πρόξενος. Hosts in antiquity were compelled by broad social expectations of generosity and reciprocity to accommodate ξένοι. Thus, Greek πρόξενια, like Latin *hospitium*, was but one formalized manifestation of the widespread reciprocal obligations that linked long-distance relationships and facilitated travel in antiquity.[62] Interactions between travelers and their hosts followed the "πρόξενος-paradigm"—i.e., the coherent and shared set of assumptions for friendships between communities.[63] Decrees πρόξενια decrees formalized the implicit social calculus. As itinerant Christians encountered the same risks and friction points as other ancient travelers, they would have naturally availed themselves of the πρόξενος-paradigm and sought to cultivate a πρόξενος-like relationship with prominent people in destination communities. Travelers passing through Colossae would have interacted with Philemon as a πρόξενος, the prominent local figure who extended hospitality. The institution of πρόξενια helps us reconstruct, in an imaginative yet controlled manner, social relations among early Christian travelers and Philemon. The remainder of this section examines four social implications of Philemon's πρόξενος-like hospitality.

1. The impact of πρόξενος-like hospitality upon travelers. We can imagine the range of πρόξενος-like services that Christian travelers might have received from Philemon. If a believing business person like Lydia of nearby Thyatira (Acts 16:14) sought to conduct business in Colossae, Philemon might arrange introductions in the agora. If and when Paul or his associate Mark passed through Colossae (Phlm 22; Col 4:10), Philemon might provide them hospitality (ξενία).[64] If Paul's associates faced accusations before local magistrates in

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[62] The Roman institution of *hospitium* was a similar social institution in the Latin west that facilitated interactions between members of different communities. However, whereas Greek πρόξενια allowed mobility between Greek communities, Latin *hospitium* structured political-military alliances between potentially hostile states; see John Nicols, "Hospitality among the Romans," in *The Oxford Handbook of Social Relations in the Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Nicols, "The Rituals of Hospitium: The Tesserae Hospitales"; Mack, *Proxeny and Polis*, 231 states the Roman institution "seems likely to have been developed in imitation of *proxenia*—or even as a translation of it."

[63] Mack, *Proxeny and Polis*, 24–26.

[64] The term ξενία in Phlm 22 provides a direct semantic connection with πρόξενια and the most explicit example of Philemon assuming the role of πρόξενος. The term ξενία generally refers to "hospitality, entertainment" but could also refer to the physical space in which hospitality was provided, as in "guest room, lodging." The latter meaning seems preferable in Phlm 22 (see BDAG, s.v.; Acts 28:23; Ps.-Clem., Hom. 12.2). Paul asks Philemon to prepare a space, presumably in his own house, for him when he travels

Colossae (Acts 17:8–9), Philemon might advocate on their behalf. If a Christian leader wanted his letter read and then distributed (Col 4:16), Philemon might arrange the manuscript's public recitation and then transcription. These are some imagined ways in which Philemon, as a πρόξενος-like host, might have assisted believers who traveled from the outside.

Beyond the material and logistical assistance, Paul specifies the affective impact of Philemon's hospitality. He refreshed the saints' "hearts" (σπλάγχνον). The Greek term σπλάγχνον has the physiological meaning of inward parts, especially viscera. However, as in the NT, the word referred to psychological aspects, the seat of emotions, as in the English terms "inmost feelings" or "heart."[65] Ignatius similarly commended the Smyrneans, saying they "have refreshed me in every respect, physically as well as spiritually" (σαρκί τε καὶ πνεύματι, *Tral.* 12.1). "Refreshment" for travelers involved more than itinerants' material sustenance. Philemon's actions relieved travelers of their vulnerability and fragility as outsiders before the community. His roof protected them from unwanted demands, accusations, or attacks. By hosting people in his house, the host lent his own local social capital to his visitors, thus giving them essential credibility and respectability within the local community. This spared travelers from the stigma of socio-physical displacement and would have been crucial for a new religious community facing opposition. Such assistance certainly improved the travelers' affective disposition and refreshed their hearts.

2. The status of Philemon as a πρόξενος-like host. The interactions between Philemon and his visitors proved mutually beneficial. In "refreshing" his itinerant guest, Philemon was reckoned virtuous. His hospitality was the behavioral referent behind Paul's language in Phlm 5–7. Philemon's actions demonstrate his trust-allegiance to Christ (πίστις) and generous disposition toward fellow Christians (ἀγάπη). Hospitality manifests the host's virtuous character and relationship with others. Commentators have debated whether the Pauline term

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to Colossae. Philemon would have more than sufficient time for the task, as Paul still had to be released from prison and then travel to Colossae. Hence, the request is more rhetorical than a matter of urgent logistics—Paul will arrive and see whether Philemon has heeded his request to "welcome" Onesimus. For our purposes here, Paul's mention of ξενία in Phlm 22 reveals Philemon's role as a host with control of lodging spaces for travelers, and this was known to others.

[65] BDAG, s.v. σπλάγχνον.

κοινωνία in v. 6 means objective "fellowship" between peoples[66] or the subjective experiences of "participation."[67] However, the practical expression of ideology merges the interpretive positions. People articulate their beliefs, including social connectedness, through embodied experiences, such as commensality and hospitality. The exigencies of life, such as the appearance of a guest, push ideological beliefs toward embodied actions. In Phlm 6, κοινωνία likely refers to the joint fellowship that created and was created by Philemon's behavior toward itinerants. Philemon's hospitality displayed key Christian virtues, for which he became known.

Philemon's πρόξενος-like actions also afforded him authority as a central figure. Among Christians in the first century, the benefits that host-leaders such as Philemon provided were not the conventional forms of benefaction, such as public monuments or civic festivals. Rather, the benefits from πρόξενοι included social connections and physical access. Early Christianity was not a decentralized network in which everyone had direct access to everyone else. Movement occurred through certain centralized nodes. Without key significant figures who could domestically host regular gatherings and traveling visitors, most early Christians could not have fully participated in, or interacted with other members of, the network. Only a limited number of people had sufficient resources to extend πρόξενια-like benefits to travelers. People coming to Colossae had to come through a prominent, connected person such as Philemon, making him central in the community. In social network theory, "centrality" measures the density and importance of certain nodal points within a network. The measure of a point's centrality generally indicates its "power, influence, popularity, and prestige."[68] As networks scale up, centralized nodes become prominent within the network because they facilitate movement and interconnections. By opening their doors to travelers, Christian hosts became proverbial gatekeepers to the broader social network (cf. 3 John 9–

[66] John M. G. Barclay, "Κοινωνια and the Social Dynamics of the Letter to Philemon," in *La Lettre À Philémon Et L'ecclésiologie Paulinienne*, ed. Daniel Marguerat, Benedictina 22 (Leuven: Peeters, 2016), 153.
[67] Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon*, 318; Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, 193 agrees, referencing the early-twentieth century position.
[68] John Scott and Peter J. Carrington, eds., *The SAGE Handbook of Social Network Analysis* (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE, 2011), 5–6.

10).[69] Philemon's capacity to enable mobility and foster connectivity would have conferred a measure of authority and status.

3. Πρόξενια forming a network identity. The network dynamics of πρόξενια suggest how travel shaped a common translocal identity among Christians. Networks of πρόξενια allowed citizens to locate themselves, both geographically and socially, in relation to others. As the institutions for mediating interactions across space, "networks of πρόξενοι were the most important means by which poleis understood and constructed their connectivity, emphasizing their links with particular poleis and regions, and their own position in relation to them."[70] Greek communities would publicly inscribe lists of all their πρόξενοι.[71] These catalogs of their social network advertised the group's connectivity and importance. The potentiality for travel and access to other communities reflected their network membership. Travel via πρόξενια embodied participation with and acceptance from other communities. Philemon's hospitality allowed Christians from other locations to expand and participate in the broader network of early Christian communities. Paul's associates, while in Ephesus, had a concrete social link to Colossae and other communities throughout Asia Minor. As πρόξενοι lists reveal, social groups, whether a polis or an emerging religious group, expressed their social membership and legitimacy through connectivity with other communities.[72] In this way, πρόξενια-like networks among early Christian communities created relational ties that forged a shared identity.

Πρόξενοι did not host any and all travelers, but maintained a commitment to a particular group. Only certain travelers could expect πρόξενια services. Often, the limitations were based on geography or familial relationships. However, early Christian hosts extended assistance to people who shared a common religious identity. They partnered with co-believers in Christ. When early Christ-followers traveled to foreign cities, their identity as Christians became foregrounded, for that became the basis for securing hospitality and assistance from Christian hosts. Physical mobility prompted people to publicize their social

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[69] Ramsay, *Church in the Roman Empire*, 364 developed a thesis that the Christian *episkopoi* oversaw the distribution of letters and hospitality of travelers. While Ramsay saw this take shape in the early second century (Ign. *Rom.* 9; *Smyr* 11; *Poly.* 7; Hermas, *Vision* 2.4.3; Lucian, *Pereg.* 12, 41), his theory opens a key insight into early Christian leadership. Even during the apostolic period, leadership authority was correlated with the capacity to host travelers and facilitate movement.

[70] Mack, *Proxeny and Polis*, 149.

[71] For a catalogue of extant proxeny lists, see Mack, *Proxeny and Polis*, 286–354.

[72] Mack, *Proxeny and Polis*, 191.

identities for the new friendship. Travel dislocated them, and then hospitality connections relocated them to a particular social group marked by a common association with Christ. Through physical mobility, they participated in and were known within a broader social network, and thus were recognized as among the "saints" and "believers." Philemon's practice of πρόξενια-like behavior performed and reinforced the translocal Christian identity, both hosts and guests.

4. The concepts of "doing good" and "being willing" in πρόξενια*.* Paul did not unilaterally choose to retain Onesimus, but sent him to Philemon so that Philemon himself could determine Onesimus' future movements. Paul claims to have done this "in order that your good deed might be voluntary and not something forced" (ἵνα μὴ ὡς κατὰ ἀνάγκην τὸ ἀγαθόν σου ᾖ ἀλλὰ κατὰ ἑκούσιον; Phlm 14). Paul's language here reflects the πρόξενος-paradigm. In πρόξενια inscriptions, "doing good" and "being willing/eager" were stock characteristics of πρόξενοι. A πρόξενος grant from Thaumakoi in Thessaly, dating from ca. 50 BCE, notes these two qualities in the honoree: "since his earliest youth he has lived his life always being *the cause of some good* for the polis of the Thaumakoi and for those of its citizens who meet him, *lacking no eagerness or zeal* on behalf of the interests of the polis of the Thaumakoi."[73] I examine each concept in turn as it relates to Phlm 14.[74]

In the guest-host context of πρόξενια inscriptions, "good" refers to the personal preference and partiality of πρόξενοι toward people visiting from the granting community. To "do good" meant to engage in concrete acts of hospitality assistance.[75] Inscribed decrees regularly depict πρόξενοι as those who "do whatever good they can" (ποεῖ ὅτι δύναται ἀγαθόν) toward their visitors.[76] In verse 14, Paul is not referring to a generic unstated good deed,[77] but the specific intermediating services he desires from Philemon (vv. 17, 20). At this point in the epistle, Paul is discussing his preference for Onesimus' future return to Paul. So, Paul's rationale applies to Philemon's choice regarding the eventual *sending* (not initial *welcoming*) of Onesimus. This form of assistance falls within the range of expected πρόξενος-like services.

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[73] *IG* IX 2 219, ll. 3–6, translation from Mack, *Proxeny and Polis*, 85, emphasis added.
[74] "Doing good" and "eager willingness" were used to describe many forms of ancient benefaction, not only πρόξενια.
[75] Mack, *Proxeny and Polis*, 34–35.
[76] Mack, *Proxeny and Polis*, 47.
[77] O'Brien, *Colossians-Philemon*, 299, "Up to this point nothing is stated explicitly about the nature of this good deed."

Responsibility for outbound travelers until their next destination was a regular and equally important function of hosts in foreign locations.[78] Paul requests for Philemon, by virtue of his material resources and social connections, to authorize and support Onesimus' travel.[79] Paul's reference to Philemon's "good," rather than being ambiguous and uncertain, relates to his role in facilitating the movement of Onesimus.

Paul wants Philemon to function like a πρόξενος who does good in a voluntary, deliberate manner (κατὰ ἑκούσιον).[80] Commentators interpret Paul's rationale here as an exemplar of modern ethical ideals such as freedom, autonomy, and independence. They claim that Paul dared not impose or manipulate, but allowed Philemon to exercise moral autonomy. His decision would be free of external imposition and, therefore, authentic.[81] However, Paul's language of "doing good *willingly*" should not be refracted back through the Kantian notion of moral autonomy. In πρόξενια-relationships, granting communities esteemed the willingness and eagerness (προθυμία) of πρόξενοι to help people from the granting community. Such willing eagerness pointed to the giver's beneficence or admirable inclination toward generosity. In Phlm 14, the language of "willingness" meant that Philemon's kindness toward travelers would flow from his generous disposition, not some unconstrained autonomy. Paul expresses his reliance upon Philemon as a potential giver of πρόξενια-like services. In *On Benefits,* Seneca emphasized that gifts/benefits consisted of "the very desire to benefit," not the thing given; true gifts were to be given "gladly," with "willingness" and "a desire to help" (1.6.3).[82] In Phlm 14, the language of κατὰ ἑκούσιον

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[78] E.g., Homer, *Od.* 3.325-27, 368-70, 475-86; Gen 18:16; Acts 17:14–15; 21:5; 28:10; Rom 15:24; 1 Cor 16:10; 2 Cor 1:16; Tit 3:13; 3 Jn 6; see Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 188–89.

[79] This claim is expanded and supported in Chapter 5; here I discuss only the semantics of Philemon's "good."

[80] CGL, s.v. ἑκούσιος. While Paul's term, ἑκούσιος, is not the same as the common πρόξενια-term προθυμία, the synonyms (see 1 Pet 5:2) both evoke euergetical obligations.

[81] E.g., Moo, *Colossians and Philemon*, 416; O'Brien, *Colossians-Philemon*, 299 explains, "His overriding concern is that Philemon should be free to decide for himself as to how he should act; there should not be even the slightest hint of coercion or any intrusion into Philemon's decision"; see also, Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon*, 332–33, who reads Paul's rationale as a concession of his weakness; Paul considered his options and "realized that without Philemon's willing agreement nothing that Paul decided with regard to Onesimus would be satisfactory or right."

[82] Seneca opens the section, "What is a benefit (*beneficium*)? It is the act of a well-wisher (*benevola*) who bestows joy and derives joy from the bestowal of it, and is inclined to do what he does *from the prompting of his own will* (*sponte*). And so what counts is, not what is done or what is given, but *the spirit of the action*, because a benefit consists, not in what is done or given, but in *the intention of the giver or doer*" (*On Benefits*, 1.6.1, emphasis added, trans. Basore, LCL).

elicits the proper disposition of a beneficent giver. By acting willingly as a πρόξενος-like host when sending Onesimus back to Paul, Philemon would have been credited with initiating the benefit exchange and advancing his reciprocal relationship with Paul. By inviting Philemon to "do good willingly," Paul positions him to function as a socially compelled (not morally autonomous) generous benefactor eager to fulfill expectations toward his guests.[83]

This section (§4.4) has presented the πρόξενος-paradigm—a common model in antiquity for relationships across space—to explain Philemon's persona as a host to Christian travelers. Philemon's πρόξενος-like hospitality had several social implications. It would have provided material support and emotional encouragement to travelers, raised his status as a centralized figure, increased the translocal network identity of Christian communities, and shaped the meaning of Paul's request for Philemon to do good willingly.

§4.5 The Identity and Effects of Philemon's Guests

The previous two sections regarding the meaning of ἀναπαύω (§4.3) and the institution of πρόξενια (§4.4) explored Philemon's persona as a host to traveling Christians. Travel impacted the life of this leading figure in the early Christian community of Colossae. We now move from his general role as a host to more specific historical questions about Philemon's guests. Who were the saints whom Philemon hosted? What were the social effects of their visit? These considerations reveal further nuances about the nature and social significance of travel among Christians in Paul's network.

In terms of the actual identity of Philemon's guests, the primary candidates are the five Pauline associates who greet Philemon in vv. 23–24—Epaphras, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke.[84] The five people who sent greetings to Philemon were active participants in the network whose travels formed the social network through which Paul, Philemon, and

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[83] The semantic range of the Latin adjective *liberalis*, referring to a person's freeborn position and/or noble-minded generosity, illustrates the social calculus of ancients; freedom was an opportunity to give in whatever manner and to whomever one chose.

[84] "Jesus who is called Justus" (Ἰησοῦς ὁ λεγόμενος Ἰοῦστος) sends greetings in Col 4:11, but not in Phlm. However, his name might have appeared in Phlm 23, but was then changed by later scribes, who dropped the final sigma to create a designation for Christ. E. Amling, "Eine Konjectkur in Philemonbrief," ZNW 10 (1909) 261–2 first proposed this single-letter emendation, which seems plausible, though conjectural. If true, he would be a sixth greeter. For arguments against, see Peter M. Head, "Onesimus the Letter Carrier and the Initial Reception of Paul's Letter to Philemon," *JTS* 71, no. 2 (2020): 634, fn 12.

Onesimus related.[85] Their physical movement transmitted the basic components of the translocal social group, such as information and influence. The travel of these Pauline associates to Colossae best accounts for three facts presumed in Phlm: Paul's knowledge of Philemon's behavior (vv. 5–7), the source of Philemon's relationship with Paul (vv. 19–20), and Onesimus' information about Paul (v. 10). These three social realities, each discussed below, necessitate a particular set of mobile events best identified with the greeters' visit to Philemon.

1. Paul's information about Philemon. Phlm 5 reveals a regular link between Paul's associates and Philemon in Colossae. The participle ἀκούων (v. 5), as the basis of Paul's thanksgiving, indicates that Paul has heard about Philemon's notable conduct from other people. Someone reported Philemon's faith and love to Paul. In a world without digital media, that messenger physically traveled from Colossae to Paul. Some commentators suggest that Onesimus was Paul's source about Philemon, claiming he "must have spoken warmly of his master."[86] However, the relational tension that drove Onesimus from Colossae renders him an unlikely source of Philemon's virtues. Instead, the news probably came from the people mentioned in the final greetings (vv. 23-24). The fact that they send greetings suggests that they know Philemon and thus were in his physical presence. Although their acquaintance with Philemon could have occurred remotely through third-party intermediaries, the personal nature of the epistolary greetings suggests that it resulted from in-person encounters. Considering that Philemon likely did not come to them in Ephesus (see point 2 below), the reasonable deduction is that they went to him in Colossae. If Philemon hosted the church gathering (v. 2), Paul's associates would likely have been hosted by Philemon when they joined that event. The content of Paul's information about Philemon suggests that the messengers knew about his loving hospitality (vv. 5–7) and ability to

[85] Most commentators overlook the social background and significance of these five Pauline associates and their relationship with believers in Colossae. For those who read the greetings for historical information, the similarity of names between Phlm 23–24 and Col 4:10-14 helps untangle the letters' background, such as date, location, and authorship; see Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, 207; Moo, *Colossians and Philemon*, 439–41; O'Brien, *Colossians-Philemon*, 310–11. For those who note the greetings' rhetorical function, the mention of additional names in v. 2 and here in vv. 23–24 publicizes Paul's request in order to exert social pressure upon Philemon; see Norman Petersen, *Rediscovering Paul: Philemon and the Sociology of Paul's Narrative World* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 100; Weima, *Neglected Endings*, 236; Lau, *Defending Shame*, 141.

[86] Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon*, 317; also, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Letter to Philemon*, ABC (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 93; Scott, *The Epistles of Paul*, 103.

provide future accommodations (v. 22). The messengers' past travel events, during which they physically and socially benefitted from Philemon's concrete acts of hospitality, form the basis of their knowledge about Philemon and the occasion behind the list of personal greetings.[87]

The hospitality benefits that the five greeters received from Philemon shaped their view of Philemon and what they reported to Paul. Paul learned of Philemon's "love" and "faith" through Philemon's former guests. The guest-host nature of their relationship with Philemon influenced Paul's perception of Philemon's character. Travelers carried their reviews about hosts to other potential travelers. This was vital within Paul's ministry circles predicated upon high levels of itineration. Early Christian travelers relied upon distant hosts, which shaped the nature of those relationships and the content they reported to others. In this instance, the five Pauline associates' travel to Colossae resulted in their guest-host relationship with Philemon, whose reputation reached back to Paul through them, thus creating social pathways for future connectivity between Paul and Philemon.

2. The source of Philemon's relationship with Paul. When making his request to Philemon, Paul broaches Philemon's social debt—"you also owe me yourself" (καὶ σεαυτόν μοι προσοφείλεις, v. 19). The language of indebtedness likely refers to Philemon's conversion through Paul's ministry. Philemon had become part of the Christian community through some past encounter with Paul, which implies physical movement for the initial connection, and then another subsequent travel resulting in their separation when Phlm was composed. Because Paul had not visited Colossae (Col 2:1), some suppose that Philemon met Paul in another location, such as Ephesus. According to Dunn, Philemon, as a successful businessman, "must have traveled from his home (presumably on business) to where he had encountered Paul."[88] However, Col 4:13 identifies Epaphras as the primary person responsible for the churches in Colossae, Laodicea, and Hieropolis. This suggests that Philemon was not responsible for the initial founding of the church in Colossae. For, if Philemon had been converted elsewhere and played a foundational role in bringing the gospel

[87] Epaphras was a local of Colossae and so might have stayed in his family's (or friend's) house instead of Philemon's. However, even in that scenario, he would have learned about Philemon's activities through other local connections, if not through the church gathering at Philemon's house. In language resembling Phlm 5, Paul reports that Epaphras had made known to him the Colossians' love in the Spirit (Col 1:8).
[88] Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon*, 301.

to his household in Colossae, Paul risked offending Philemon by not mentioning his work.[89] Therefore, Philemon likely encountered Paul *in*directly through Pauline associates. Paul depicts Epaphras as the main founder of the Colossian church (Col 1:7–9; 4:12–13), but he did not labor alone. Trebilco notes, "The collaborative nature of Paul's mission work would certainly suggest that there was more than one person who took the Gospel 'inland' [from Ephesus] to the Lycus Valley."[90] The greeters mentioned (Col 4:10–14; Phlm 24) were the people who probably collaborated with Epaphras.[91] They have seemingly visited Colossae and so were known by the Colossians, which explains how Paul could mention them without explaining their identity. The movement of these Pauline associates to Colossae best explains the origin of Paul's relationship with Philemon.

Philemon indeed could have traveled to Paul in Ephesus and become converted *after* Epaphras had already founded the church in Colossae, but nothing corroborates this. However, there are mentions of Pauline associates traveling both out from Ephesus (Acts 19:10) and from Philemon to Paul (Phlm 5). The present tense participle ἀκούων in v. 5 could suggest multiple reports about Philemon to Paul. The simplest, and thus most likely, reconstruction is to situate Philemon's conversion during one of those journeys by Paul's associate from Ephesus to Colossae.

The fact that Philemon did not encounter Paul in person does not per se weaken the sense of his debt to Paul (v. 19). Just as Paul conceived of sending himself to Philemon across space and then receiving benefits from Philemon through the person of Onesimus (v. 17–19), he could have also imagined Philemon's relational indebtedness extending across space through his ministry associates. Paul often envisioned a sense of obligation and influence between people who had not yet met in person, but who were linked only through the travel of intermediaries. He asserted a measure of authority over churches in Colossae and Rome

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[89] Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul*, 235–36.

[90] Paul R. Trebilco, "Christians in the Lycus Valley: The View from Ephesus and from Western Asia Minor," in *Colossae in Space and Time: Linking to an Ancient City*, ed. Alan H. Cadwallader and Michael Trainor (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 185.

[91] Trebilco, "Christians in the Lycus Valley," 85 claims, "Only Epaphras is mentioned in Colossians in such glowing terms because he is the only founder currently with Paul as he writes (Col 4:12)." However, this argument from silence is not the only, or best, explanation for who brought Christianity to the Lycus Valley. Epaphras appears to have been their principal instructor (Col 1:7), but Paul assumed that the Christians in Colossae were personally acquainted with several other co-workers.

despite never visiting those cities; Christians in Achaia and Macedonia were obliged to aid fellow Christians in Jerusalem (1 Cor 9:11; Rom 15:22). In these instances, the travel of intermediaries formed and sustained obligations across space. In his relationship with Philemon, Paul believed that the social bond created through his associates' itineration could bear the weight of his epistolary request. If Philemon was converted without ever meeting Paul, travel by Pauline associates mediated reciprocal benefits and obligations across physical distance. Their travel became the payment infrastructure through which Paul gave Philemon his own self and could in turn request repayment (vv. 19–20). The associates' movement transmitted social obligations between two physically dispersed people.

3. Onesimus' knowledge of Paul. Murphy-O'Connor asks a simple yet crucial question: "How did Onesimus, a pagan (Philem. 10), know of Paul's influence on this master, and how did he know where to find Paul in far-away Ephesus?"[92] Onesimus had not become a Christian (v. 10–11) and had likely not personally met Paul. Yet, he supposed that Paul could help resolve his dispute with Philemon.[93] Onesimus had somehow acquired enough information to (1) regard Paul as a potential mediator and (2) find him in a specific location. Rapske suggests that such information would have been readily available to Onesimus as common knowledge among the Christians in Colossae.[94] However, his reconstruction does not identify the actual source of such information for the people in Colossae. On the first point, Rapske claims that Onesimus would know about Paul's influence in his master's life because of Philemon's positive behavior, such as moral change, hosting the church, and personal ministry activities. However, Philemon's social behavior would not have made Paul's influence self-evident. And if Onesimus departed from Philemon on negative terms, Philemon's behavior would not be the likely source of Onesimus' knowledge regarding Paul's authority. On the second point, Rapske suggests that Paul's location would have been public knowledge among Colossian Christians and thus easily known to Onesimus. Because the Colossians continually prayed for Paul in prison (Col 4:18; Phlm 22), he claims that Onesimus, as a member of the household, "could not have been unaware of the facts of Paul's imprisonment and his location."[95] Even if true, this does not explain how and whence

[92] Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul*, 235.
[93] The initial purpose of Onesimus' departure is examined in §5.2, which argues that Onesimus did seek out Paul as a mediator (*amicus domini*).
[94] Brian Rapske, "The Prisoner Paul in the Eyes of Onesimus," *NTS* 37, no. 2 (1991): 201.
[95] Rapske, "The Prisoner Paul," 202.

the church in Colossae, including Onesimus, had learned about the fact and whereabouts of Paul's imprisonment. A certain source must have physically transported news of Paul's situation, either by letter or in person. The most likely source of Onesimus' knowledge of Paul would have been Pauline associates who traveled from Paul to Colossae. Through conversations in Philemon's house, Onesimus learned about the status and whereabouts of Paul. Although Onesimus did not identify religiously with the Christians who gathered in Philemon's house, he would have encountered Paul's associates during the Christian gatherings and their stay at Philemon's house, events which Onesimus would have helped facilitate as a household slave. These encounters produced, in Onesimus' mind, the persona of Paul as a potential mediator.

As itinerant ministers in Philemon's house, Pauline associates benefited from the domestic chores that Onesimus the slave performed and thus might have been inclined to vouch for Onesimus when he arrived at Paul. Their travel provided Onesimus with the social connections necessary for his future departure from Philemon. After the Pauline associates departed from Colossae and returned to Paul, Philemon follows their path to the enchained apostle. As a slave seeking to depart, Onesimus would have considered not only Paul's influence over his master, but also his own access to Paul through mutual intermediaries. Through their travel to Colossae, the associates of Paul had made themselves, in the eyes of Onesimus, mediators to the mediator.

§4.6 Conclusions

This chapter has considered the various travels reflected in Phlm. In particular, I discussed the antecedent travel events that produced the network of social ties linking people between the communities of Paul and Philemon. The result has been a more granular analysis of early Christian social roles and identities, especially that of Philemon, in light of travel. After considering the geographical location of Philemon in Colossae, we argued that ἀναπαύω in v. 7, along with the historical geography of the Lycus Valley, points toward the fact that Philemon functioned as a prominent host of Christian travelers. We then incorporated the social institution of πρόξενια to better discern the nature and social implications of such hospitality for Philemon and others. The final section specifically identified Philemon's guests as the five Pauline associates who greet him in Phlm 23–24, as this best accounts for

important aspects of the triangular relationship between Paul, Philemon, and Onesimus. Philemon's hospitality in Colossae enabled the travel that, in several ways, formed new relational ties between his community in Colossae and Paul's people.

Trebilco noted about Christians in Western Asian Minor, including the Lycus Valley: "[O]ne dimension of their social identity was a strong, lively and informed sense of participation in a wider movement. We see a network of geographically dispersed communities with close and constant communication amongst themselves."[96] Details from Paul's personal epistle to Philemon collaborate and enrich this picture of early Christianity as a network of communities in close communication. Physical mobility linked the groups across space. Travel carved pathways for the transmission of information, identity, and influence between individuals within those communities. Though Paul had not yet visited the Lycus Valley in person, the mobility of his associates transported his apostolic persona and influence to people in Colossae. Through reports from travelers, people in geographically dispersed communities developed conceptual personas about each other. In Paul's mind, Philemon was a virtuous host; in Onesimus' mind, Paul was a potential mediator. Travel caused Christians to be known in a certain way in distant places. For the early Christian communities in and around Colossae, physical movement formed and structured social relations across space. Among the communities of early Christians in Colossae, travel generated reputations, praise, social debt, personas, authority, and even the hope of reconciliation.

The focus on travel in Phlm has the interesting result of decentering Paul himself. The various identities and relationships resulting from travel occurred without any Pauline journeys. He was confined to prison and could only, at most, coordinate the travel of other believers. In a social network shaped by travel, his immobility relegates him to a less-active, spectator role. Paul seems aware of this irony. In the brief letter prompted by Onesimus' departure and return, he references his own captivity five times (vv. 1, 9, 10, 13, 23).[97] Instead of his customary self-designations as ἀπόστολος or δοῦλος in the opening greeting,

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[96] Trebilco, "Christians in the Lycus Valley," 184.

[97] Vv. 1 (δέσμιος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ), 9 (δέσμιος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ), 10 and 13 (ἐν τοῖς δεσμοῖς τοῦ εὐαγγελίου). The genitive of explanation in each instance provides the reason behind Paul's chains. Paul also refers to Epaphras as a συναιχμάλωτος (v. 23; Col 4:11). Although in Romans 16:7 the term alludes to a past shared imprisonment, here the term seems to refer to their present circumstances.

Paul introduces himself as a δέσμιος.[98] The references to Paul's captivity have the effect of foregrounding the travel of Onesimus and other itinerants, mobile events that Paul appears eager to interpret in his letter.

Social analysis in light of travel ultimately sheds light on Philemon's persona and helps resolve the question that opened this chapter—Who was Philemon? According to Paul's letter to him, he was most notably a host. As a prominent believer in Colossae, he refreshed the saints through his hospitality, welcomed the Pauline associates, and was asked to prepare a guest room for Paul. Travel explains Philemon's persona and also provides the social background for Paul's letter. The imprisoned apostle was asking Philemon the host to welcome and "refresh" one more Christian traveler—Onesimus, his departed slave who was now returning.

[98] Paul introduced himself as an "apostle" in Rom 1:1; 1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1; Gal 1:1; Col 1:1. "Servant" appears in Rom 1:1 and Phil 1:1. Letters to the Thessalonians do not include any self-designation in the opening.

Chapter 5. Onesimus' Travel

§5.1 Introducing Onesimus' Travel

The epistle of Phlm yields an incomplete picture of the situation between Philemon, Onesimus, and Paul.[1] However, the basic movements are evident. Onesimus departed from Philemon; then, after meeting Paul, he returned to Philemon. While Onesimus' two-way journey forms the immediate background of Phlm, the significance and implications of his movement are frustratingly ambiguous in the letter. What prompted Onesimus' travel? How were his movements interpreted by each party? Who did Onesimus travel as? The previous chapter, in discussing Philemon's persona as a host in Colossae, established the geographical and social contexts for Onesimus' travels. Building upon these points, this chapter addresses Onesimus' social identity within Paul's network in light of mobility. Before that, we discuss three preliminary issues that shall bear upon our analysis and interpretation of Onesimus' travel.

One, Onesimus made two separate trips—a departure from Philemon to Paul, then a return from Paul to Onesimus. Reconstructions of the letter's historical background tend to collapse Onesimus' movement into a singular event. This fails to distinguish between his two journeys, their contexts, and their meanings. Onesimus' departure and return should be analyzed as two distinct travel events for three reasons—the trips occurred at two separate moments in time; once Paul became involved in the matter, Onesimus' return journey occurs within a different web of relationships; and Onesimus' conversion between the travel events resets the ideological framework that defined his being and actions. Overall, Onesimus' two journeys occurred in different historical, social, and ideological contexts, and those unique contexts confer different meanings upon the two trips (cf. §2.1.1). Therefore, this chapter analyzes his departure (§5.2) and return (§5.3) as two separate travel events. Both sections assess the prevailing theories explaining Onesimus' travel event, argue for a certain context

[1] On the variety of scholarly reconstructions to establish its background, see Tolmie, "Tendencies in the Research on the Letter of Philemon since 1980."

and meaning for the travel event, and then draw conclusions about social relations within Paul's network of churches in light of those travel dynamics.

Two, the text of Phlm and the meaning of Onesimus' travel are mutually constitutive. Our primary source for Onesimus' travel is the text of Phlm. We cannot interpret his travel apart from Paul's epistle. At the same time, Onesimus' departure and return are essential preconditions for the letter of Phlm. If Onesimus had not traveled in both directions, there would have been no occasion for Paul to write his letter that accompanied Onesimus upon his return. This fact helps establish the travel context of Paul's letter. The letter of Phlm could be regarded as a travel document—a text that enables and interprets Onesimus' movement. The interconnections between text and travel event require us to untangle conventional approaches to the former in order to properly interpret the latter. Thus, this chapter discusses the form, rhetoric, and reception of Phlm to establish a proper framework for interpreting Onesimus' travel.

Three, Onesimus' social identity is critical for interpreting his travel. Who was Onesimus? For most of reception history, Onesimus has been defined by his servile legal status. Like Philemon, his identity has been essentialized—Onesimus was a "slave." Paul's letter to Philemon only once refers to Onesimus as a slave, and that reference emphasizes that Onesimus was in fact not, or "no longer," a slave (Phlm 16). The letter of Phlm reveals a complex picture of Onesimus' social identity. Paul considered Onesimus his own son (v. 10), even his own heart (v. 12, 20), who brings benefits to others (v. 11) and could be of service to Paul (v. 13). The profile of Onesimus in Phlm involves more complexity and relationality than the designation "slave" allows. As Paul stated, Onesimus was more than a slave. This is critical for interpreting Onesimus' travel. If Onesimus gets a priori essentialized as a slave, then the meanings of his travel get defined (or worse, assumed) accordingly—his departure was running away, and his travel back to Philemon was Paul returning lost property. Movement and identity perform and define each other, especially in the case of Onesimus. Therefore, this chapter pays close attention to Onesimus' social identity to interpret the meaning of his travel. With those methodological considerations in mind, we now examine Onesimus' departure and return.

§5.2 Onesimus' Departure to Seek a Mediator

Onesimus' departure—a double-sided movement from Philemon and to Paul—instigated the relational issues at the heart of Phlm. The departure fueled tensions between Onesimus and Philemon and it drew Paul into the matter. The fact of Onesimus' initial movement from Philemon's household to Paul's location is apparent in Paul's references to Onesimus returning to Philemon (Phlm 11–12, 15). However, the circumstances and purpose of Onesimus' departure are never stated.[2] Because of Paul's silence about Onesimus' departure, we remain unclear about a basic question: What prompted Onesimus' departure from Philemon? To fill the void of clear information about the occasion, purpose, and meaning of Onesimus' departure, three main reconstructions of the letter's background story have been proposed. They are: (1) Philemon sent Onesimus for some task, (2) Onesimus was running away, and (3) Onesimus was seeking mediation.[3] This section weighs these three principal theories for why Onesimus departed and how he came into Paul's presence. Then we observe what Onesimus' departure might reveal about early Christian communities.

Some commentators have proposed that Philemon (perhaps with the church in Colossae) sent Onesimus to Paul.[4] He was dispatched to bring materials or offer assistance to the imprisoned apostle. Similar to Epaphroditus, whom the Philippian church sent to Paul in prison (Phil

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[2] Several factors could explain why Paul omitted the cause of Onesimus' departure—he presumed that the letter recipients already knew the backstory; he did not want to broach an embarrassing issue for Philemon; and/or his rhetorical focus was upon defining Onesimus' future return to Philemon.

[3] For recent analyses of the main theories, see Young, *Our Brother Beloved*, 23–59; Jeffrey A. D. Weima, "Onesimus: Still a Runaway Slave," in *Rhetoric, History, and Theology: Interpreting the New Testament*, ed. Todd D. Still and Jason A. Myers (Lanham, MD: Fortress Academic, 2023), 201–30. Other variations and theories of Onesimus' departure have been presented, the most notable being Callahan, "Paul's Epistle to Philemon", which is discussed in §5.3.

[4] Sara C. Winter, "Paul's Letter to Philemon," *NTS* 33, no. 1 (1987): 1–15; Craig S. Wansink, *Chained in Christ: The Experience and Rhetoric of Paul's Imprisonments*, JSNTSS 130 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 188–98; J. Albert Harrill, *Slaves in the New Testament: Literary, Social, and Moral Dimensions* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 11–14; Young, *Our Brother Beloved*, 187. John Knox, *Philemon Among the Letters of Paul* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935) is occasionally cited as the first to question the runaway hypothesis and proposed this hypothesis. However, Knox remained agnostic about the basis of Onesimus' departure from Colossae. He says the runaway hypothesis "will serve perhaps better than any of the several others" and that Onesimus was "probably a runaway" (pp. 1–2, 29). Knox's principal claim was that Phlm requests Onesimus' future service, thus interpreting Paul's desire for Onesimus' future, not the circumstances of Onesimus' departure before the letter.

2:25; 4:18), "Onesimus could have served Paul as a servant, scribe, letter carrier, personal assistant, or combination of all these things."[5] However, Onesimus would not have been an ideal emissary to represent Philemon. The letter indicates that he was not a Christian (v. 10) and had been "useless" to Philemon (v.11). Moreover, Onesimus did not depart on amicable terms. There was apparently some fallout in the relationship (ἀδικεῖν, ὀφείλειν, ἀποτίνειν [vv.18–19]) which needed mending (v. 15, 17, 20). Paul's extraordinary rhetoric throughout the letter suggests that the tension was rather acute. So, rather than being sent as a messenger, Onesimus appears to have departed from a fractured relationship with Philemon.

In the preface to his homilies on Philemon, John Chrysostom states, as a matter of fact, that "[Philemon] had a certain slave named Onesimus. This Onesimus, having stolen something from his master, had run away."[6] This exegetical tradition of understanding Onesimus as a guilty, runaway slave was established by the fourth century[7] and became the standard reading of Paul's letter.[8] In this view, Onesimus was a *fugitivus*, a runaway slave who somehow harmed his master (v. 18), and so, out of fear, escaped to save himself. However, this reconstruction faces several obstacles. One, Phlm contains no explicit reference to Onesimus being a runaway. Though slaves in the Greco-Roman world did commonly (try to) escape,[9] Paul never suggests that this was Onesimus' motive.[10] The traditional reconstruction remains, as John Knox noted, "a tentative theory [that] rests upon no explicit statement of the letter itself."[11] Two, the runaway hypothesis requires a fortuitous encounter between Onesimus and Paul. The fact that Onesimus coincidentally fled to the same city and precise location as Paul strains credulity. Such a meeting would have been an extraordinary coincidence. Even if Onesimus landed in the same city as Paul, they would not have encountered each other through the Roman legal system. Paul, a Roman citizen, seems to have been detained under

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[5] Harrill, *Slaves in the New Testament*, 12.
[6] *PG* 62.701 (#772), ET: *NPNF* vol. 13, p. 545.
[7] Margaret M. Mitchell, "John Chrysostom on Philemon: A Second Look," *HTR* 88, no. 1 (1995): 147.
[8] For the reception history of Onesimus as a runaway repentant slave among modern interpreters, see Kreitzer, *Philemon*, 38–52.
[9] S. R. Llewelyn, "The Government Pursuit of Runaway Slaves," in *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity*, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K: Eerdmans, 1997), 9–46 catalogs literary references to runaway slaves.
[10] John G. Nordling, "Onesimus Fugitivus: A Defense of the Runaway Slave Hypothesis in Philemon," *JSNT* 13, no. 41 (1991): 110 suggest that Paul avoided the matter of Onesimus' escape to avoid offending Philemon. However, such a conjecture about the silence is hardly evidence for the runaway theory over other explanations for his departure.
[11] Knox, *Philemon Among the Letters of Paul*, 1–2.

house arrest, and Onesimus would have been assigned to penal labor (*ergastulum*).[12] Theories for how Paul and Onesimus could have met are conjectural and improbable. Three, Paul seems to question Onesimus' degree of culpability with the "if" clause of v. 18.[13] The conditional statement depicts a more complicated, disputable scenario around Onesimus' departure than a clear case of illegal escape.

An alternative hypothesis developed by Peter Lampe proposes that Onesimus left his master's household to find an *amicus domini* ("friend of the master") who could mediate reconciliation.[14] Onesimus departed to find a third party who would intercede on his behalf so that he could return to Philemon. According to Roman judicial opinions (*Dig.* 21.1.17), slaves who departed were defined by their intent when leaving their master. A *fugitivus* was a slave who left his master "for the purpose of taking to flight, or to conceal himself" and had "a deliberate intention not to return" (21.1.17.1). However, "he is not a fugitive …[who] betakes himself to a friend in order to induce him to intercede for him" (21.1.17.4).[15] This distinction within Roman law prompts us to consider the intention (and meaning) of Onesimus' departure. Did he leave to escape and hide, or to find a mediator? The latter option seems preferable, as it resolves the conundrums of the traditional runaway hypothesis. Most significantly, the *amicus domini* thesis offers a more probable explanation for how Onesimus encountered Paul in captivity—Onesimus himself sought and found Paul. Rather than running from his master, Onesimus was "purposefully *running to a friend of his master* in the hope that, through the friend's intervention, he might be happily restored to his master."[16] Moreover, two linguistic details in Phlm offer support for this theory. One, Paul's "if" clause (v. 18) suggests that Onesimus was plausibly not guilty though could be perceived as a fugitive, as would be the case if he sought a mediator. Two, the only reference to

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[12] Fitzmyer, *The Letter to Philemon*, 13.

[13] Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon*, 338–39.

[14] Peter Lampe, "Keine 'sklavenflucht' des Onesimus," *ZNW* 76 (1985): 135–37; Peter Lampe, "Affects and Emotions in the Rhetoric of Paul's Letter to Philemon: A Rhetorical-Psychological Interpretation," in *Philemon in Perspective: Interpreting a Pauline Letter*, ed. D. Francois Tolmie (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 63–65; E.R. Goodenough, "Paul and Onesimus," *HTR* 22, no. 1 (1929): 181–83, claimed that "the pressing need of Onesimus was somehow to get himself reinstated with his master." His comment that Onesimus "fled with shrewd consideration of the great respect in which Philemon held the Apostle" suggests the *amicus domini* theory. However, Goodenough proposed that Paul was a sort of "inviolable altar" at which Onesimus could claim sanctuary, as was legally permitted in antiquity. Lampe's proposal has been further developed by Rapske, "The Prisoner Paul"; Bartchy, "Philemon, Epistle To."

[15] Trans. S.P. Scott, *The Civil Law* (Cincinnati, OH: The Central Trust Co., 1932).

[16] Rapske, "The Prisoner Paul," 195–96, emphasis original.

Onesimus' initial departure appears in Phlm 15—"perhaps this is the reason he [was] separated from you for a while, so that you might have him back forever" (τάχα γὰρ διὰ τοῦτο ἐχωρίσθη πρὸς ὥραν ἵνα αἰώνιον αὐτὸν ἀπέχῃς). The passive verb ἐχωρίσθη has been viewed as a divine passive—God, the implied subject, orchestrated Onesimus' departure for the greater good of his conversion and eventual restoration.[17] However, Arzt-Graber surveyed passive instances of the verb occurring between the 2C BCE and the 1C CE and concluded that "all documents in literary and documentary sources comparable to ἐχωρίσθη in Phlm 15 offer the active meaning 'go away, leave' or 'separate' for the passive form."[18] If the verb ἐχωρίσθη carries an active (or middle) meaning, then verse 15, rather than insinuating divine providence, states Onesimus' own reason (διὰ τοῦτο) and purpose (ἵνα) for leaving. He departed from Philemon to become restored to him (ἐχωρίσθη πρὸς ὥραν ἵνα αἰώνιον αὐτὸν ἀπέχῃς).[19] For these reasons, the *amicus domini* scenario offers a more plausible explanation for Onesimus' departure.

The *amicus domini* theory has gained acceptance, but not without critical pushback.[20] We summarize three common objections to the *amicus domini* theory and counterpoints for each. According to critics of the *amicus domini* theory, we would expect that a slave seeking mediation would offer an apology,[21] as that is "almost essential to the genre" of mediation.[22] Phlm does not mention any remorse or repentance, which undermines this explanation. However, Paul might have not mentioned Onesimus' "remorse" for several reasons. Perhaps Philemon was to blame for the conflict, so Onesimus had no reason for expressing remorse;

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[17] Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, 202, "The passive verb 'he was separated from' plainly intimates that God's hidden purpose may have been behind this incident which has caused Philemon so much annoyance"; O'Brien, *Colossians-Philemon*, 299; Nordling, "Onesimus Fugitivus," 109; Moo, *Colossians and Philemon*, 419.

[18] Peter Arzt-Grabner, "Onesimus erro. Zur Vorgeschichte des Philemonbriefes," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und Kunde der Älteren Kirche* 95, no. 1–2 (2004): 138, trans. mine.

[19] This reading of ἐχωρίσθη supports the *amicus domini* theory, but we ought not put too much weight on this point. The initial "perhaps" (τάχα) suggests that the conditional sentence was more of a Pauline suggestion or proposal than actuality. Also, Paul might have utilized the ambiguity of the verb's peculiar double meaning to remain vague: "he was parted (euphemistic, passive)," and "he departed (technical, active)."

[20] For general critiques of the *amicus domini* hypothesis, see Wansink, *Chained in Christ*, 186–88; Llewelyn, "The Government Pursuit of Runaway Slaves," 41–43; N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), 9–12; Young, *Our Brother Beloved*, 39–40; Weima, "Onesimus: Still a Runaway Slave," 209–13.

[21] Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 9.

[22] Llewelyn, "The Government Pursuit of Runaway Slaves," 42; see also Young, *Our Brother Beloved*, 40.

perhaps Onesimus' conversion to Christianity included and absolved his past wrongdoing; perhaps Paul thought his own offer restored any wrong and obviated the need for Onesimus' public remorse (v. 18); perhaps Paul was motived pastorally to not upset Philemon by mentioning the issue. Paul most likely neglects the occasion of Onesimus' departure because the objective of his letter is, regardless of past events, to convince Philemon of a certain view of Onesimus as he now returns. Thus, the absence of remorse in Phlm should not be construed as evidence of any theory about Onesimus' initial departure.

Two, Roman law regarding runaway slaves, compiled in Justinian's *Digest*, might not accurately reflect Imperial-era social practices, especially in the eastern provinces with Greek and local legal customs.[23] However, Lampe cites several papyri and wax tablets from slave markets around the Roman Empire that sought to regulate slaves' status. Masters had to provide legal clarity about a slave's past, as that impacted the sales price. The regulation of slaves was not academic hair-splitting, but a market necessity because people did not want to purchase runaway slaves. Broad regulatory clarity around the issue would have been essential for economic reasons. Pliny provides at least one example of *amicus dominus* being practiced in early second-century Bithynia (*Ep*. 9.21). Despite methodological issues with using Justinian's *Digest*, escaping to find mediation appears to have been at least a legal possibility for a slave such as Onesimus in first-century Asia.

Three, some proffer a theological argument in favor of the runaway hypothesis. Paul asks Philemon to demonstrate radical forgiveness as a Christian by accepting back his former slave. In the context of returning a runaway slave, Phlm epitomizes the Christian gospel of forgiveness and reconciliation. Nordling suggests that alternative historical reconstructions, such as *amicus domini*, turn Paul's letter "into a rather dispassionate, non-theological financial transaction."[24] If Phlm was not so radical, such "routine scrap" would not have become part of the NT canon. This critique faces an obvious problem—the theological reception and subsequent canonicity of Paul's letter do not define the original purpose of

[23] J. Albert Harrill, "Using the Roman Jurists to Interpret Philemon: A Response to Peter Lampe," *ZNW* 90 (1999): 135–38; Weima, "Onesimus: Still a Runaway Slave," 209–10.
[24] Nordling, "Onesimus Fugitivus," 119; Weima, "Onesimus: Still a Runaway Slave," 206 makes this point; Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 9–10 illustrates the tendency to emphasize Onesimus' slave status for theological conclusions.

Philemon's departure. History does not accommodate theological preferences. In the end, the main objections to the *amicus domini* theory fail to disprove it.

Before his departure, Onesimus was an enslaved person, Philemon's property. Within that hierarchical arrangement, he could assume several mobile identities when departing from Philemon's house. He may have been: a gofer running his master's errands, a runaway seeking liberation, or a reconciler looking for mediation. The balance of evidence suggests the final option. Onesimus departed to find a potential *amicus domini* in Paul who could advocate on his behalf. This interpretation of his travel yields insights into the nature of his identity and the Christian community in which he traveled. The previous chapter (§4.5) noted some of the social aspects preceding Onesimus' departure, such as the impact of Pauline associates visiting Philemon's home. This section makes three additional socio-theological observations about early Christians in light of Onesimus' intentional departure.

One, the *amicus domini* theory redefines not only Onesimus' departure, but also his character and identity. Instead of a cowardly escape, his departure to Philemon was an act of purposeful reconciliation (albeit with some degree of self-interest). Onesimus' movement was not a "problem" or "crime," but a legally permissible means for addressing grievances.[25] Onesimus was an "agent of reconciliation," not "lost property." The portrayal of Onesimus in Phlm contrasts notably with the situations of other mediation-seeking slaves in antiquity, who threw themselves at the feet of naked power with tears of desperation.[26] Rather than just an immediate reprieve from punishment, Onesimus appears to have been seeking longer-term restoration. Perhaps his initiative toward reconciliation, especially across social classes, attracted Paul's notice and explains the ministry potential he found in Onesimus (v. 13). Paul explained his own itineration as a "ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor 5:20)[27] and would have sought associates who embodied that ministry philosophy.

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[25] Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon*, 306.

[26] "Pollio ordered the fellow to be thrown to the lampreys. Hereupon the slave fell on his knees before Augustus and supplicated him" (Dio, *Roman History*, 6.54.23.3, trans. Cary, LCL); "He threw himself at my feet and clung to me with as much submission as he could have done at yours. He earnestly requested me with many tears" (Pliny, *Letters*, 9.21, trans. Stowers).

[27] For the point that "we" in 2 Cor 5:20 refers to Paul's apostolic team and not Christians in general, see N. T. Wright, "On Becoming the Righteousness of God," in *Pauline Theology: 1 & 2 Corinthians*, ed. D. M. Hay (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 200–208.

Two, the destination of Onesimus' departure reflects early Christian social notions of status and authority. Rapske notes that in cases of slaves seeking mediation, the slave ran upward to an *amicus domini* who had greater authority and social rank than his offended master.[28] To explain why Onesimus would consider Paul "a good person to whom he might run," Rapske compares Paul's relationship with Philemon to two prominent figures outside the NT who were petitioned as *amicus domini*—Pliny the Younger and Caesar Augustus.[29] However, the social rank of imprisoned rabble-rouser (Paul) hardly compares to the authority of a provincial consul (Pliny) or Roman emperor (Augustus). Onesimus traveled to someone of notably low status. To find a person with the authority to mediate, he escaped to a prisoner, a person deprived of authority and agency.[30] How did a slave, despite not being a Christian himself, come to believe that an imprisoned convict had the moral authority and social capital to broker reconciliation? The most plausible explanation is that intermediators traveling between Paul and Philemon had constructed the social ties that enabled Onesimus' movement and led Onesimus to consider Paul a viable intercessor (see §4.5). During the same season in which Paul was stationed in Ephesus, several delegates from Corinth—Sosthenes,[31] Apollo,[32] Chloe's people,[33] and Stephanas' household[34]—traveled to visit the apostle. Based on Paul's epistolary response to their communiques, they expected Paul to arbitrate conflicts between the Corinthians.[35] Thus, they traveled to Ephesus to consult with him. Paul had gained some reputation as an authoritative mediator among the Christians in Corinth and presumably throughout the region. In the case of Onesimus and the Corinthians, travel reveals early

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[28] I.e., the relationship between Vedius Pollio and Caesar Augustus (Cassius Dio, *Roman Lives*, 6.54.23.2, *ca*. 15 BCE) and the well-known relationship between Sabinianus and Pliny (Pliny, *Letters*, 9.21, *ca*. 100 CE).

[29] Rapske, "The Prisoner Paul," 201.

[30] About the social authority of prisoners, see James Gilligan, *Violence: Reflections on a National Epidemic* (New York: Vintage, 1997), 111–20.

[31] The co-sender of the letter (1:1), often identified as the leader of synagogue in Acts 18:17.

[32] Cf. 1 Cor 16:12, though the reasons for his coming to Paul is unclear.

[33] W. M. Ramsay, *Historical Commentary on First Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Classics, 1996), 31–32, argues that Chloe herself was from Ephesus given that Paul quotes her as a reliable external witness to the conflict; her "people" would have been business agents who returned from Corinth with news for Paul; Hans Conzelmann, *First Corinthians*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 32 more cautiously states that we cannot "be sure whether Chloe lives in Corinth (which after all is the more likely assumption) or possibly in Ephesus."

[34] The strong commendation of Stephanas' household in 1 Cor 16:15–18 implies that they bore Paul's letter back to the church in Corinth.

[35] We cannot reconstruct the prehistory of the Corinthian correspondence with certainty, as it is impossible to discern the positions and relations of the groups.

Christians' alternative mechanisms for adjudicating communal tensions (cf. 1 Cor 6:1–8), which itself is predicated upon an alternative social matrix for reckoning status and authority. The pronouncements of Roman magistrates did not shape Paul's standing in the eyes of distant Christians. Even while enchained, Paul retained the authority to draw people seeking mediation. The Christian community constituted its own system of honor and authority, as evidenced by Onesimus' purposeful and symbolic movement toward Paul.

Three, Onesimus' departure had contested meanings. Paul's aspirations for the relationship between Onesimus and Philemon faced a quandary—Philemon, as the master of a departed slave, interpreted Onesimus' departure from a different vantage point. Regardless of Onesimus' actual intentions, Philemon would have experienced his slave's departure as a financial loss and social affront. A slave's absence signaled to the community that the master lacked control and authority over his household. This surely marred Philemon's reputation and provoked anger.[36] Philemon's response to Onesimus' departure would have been based on public perceptions more than Onesimus' intentions. Therefore, different meanings were ascribed to the same mobile event, regardless of the original cause of their conflict. The tensions resulting from conflicting interpretations of Onesimus' departure elicited Paul's epistolary response. The three participants—Philemon, Paul, and Onesimus himself—had to relationally negotiate Onesimus' mobile identity. Who did he depart as? The text of Phlm becomes a contest over meanings of movement, or mobile identities, as becomes apparent in the subsequent discussion of Onesimus' return journey.

In sum, Onesimus departed from Philemon to find, in Paul, an *amicus domini* who could mediate in the conflict with his master. This theory best accounts for the historical events and language in Phlm, and it stands against various critiques. The fact that Onesimus sought Paul for mediation reveals: the result of relational ties formed through the travel of Pauline associates, Onesimus' reconciliatory inclinations, the status of Paul as a respected arbiter within the network of Christian communities, and the conflicting interpretations of his absence from Philemon. Having established the nature and implications of Onesimus' departure, we now consider his return to Philemon.

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[36] Lampe, "Affects and Emotions," 66–67; see also, Cicero, *Ad Fam.* 13.77.3; Pliny, *Ep.* 9.21.

§5.3 Onesimus' Return as a Gospel Minister

What was the intention and meaning of Onesimus' return to Philemon? Who did he return as? The epistle of Phlm fortunately offers more data for interpreting Onesimus' return than his departure. Unfortunately, Paul's ambiguous language in Phlm provides no clear explanation for such answers. In recent decades, scholarship has considered the precise nature of Paul's request in Phlm. What exactly did Paul expect Philemon to do when his former slave Onesimus returned? Did Paul expect Philemon to legally manumit Onesimus, or simply forgive him for wrongdoing and receive him back into the household? [37] Paul does not offer a clear policy on the matter. As Barclay noted, "The letter is skillfully designed to constrain Philemon to accept Philemon's request, and yet, at the same time, it is extremely unclear what precisely Paul is requesting!"[38] The ambiguity of Paul's request is highlighted by how modern commentators, reading the same text, have managed to reach starkly different conclusions about the nature of Paul's conclusions (with original emphasis to prove their points, and mine too!). Some argue that Philemon "must grant [Onesimus] the freedom of a brother" because, in God's family, "Onesimus *never can be* Philemon's slave."[39] Yet others conclude that Paul actually co-owned Onesimus with Philemon, so "Onesimus' slave status *has to remain* unquestioned by Paul."[40] Between these two poles, scholars have offered a variety of proposals regarding Paul's intentions in Phlm.[41]

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[37] Reidar Aasgaard, *"My Beloved Brothers and Sisters": Christian Siblingship in Paul* (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 252 typifies the conventional approach when summarizing scholarship on this point: "Within such a context, what might Paul imply by denoting Onesimus his and Philemon's 'brother'? Roughly speaking, two main options present themselves: that Philemon must manumit him, or that Onesimus remains a slave, but with a change in Philemon to a more 'brotherly' attitude towards him."

[38] John M. G. Barclay, "Paul, Philemon and the Dilemma of Christian Slave-Ownership," *NTS* 37, no. 2 (1991): 170–71.

[39] Young, *Our Brother Beloved*, 179–80; see also, G.F. Wessels, "The Letter of Philemon in the Context of Slavery in Early Christianity," in *Philemon in Perspective: Interpreting a Pauline Letter*, ed. D. Francois Tolmie (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 163–68.

[40] Ulrike Roth, "Paul, Philemon, and Onesimus: A Christian Design for Mastery," *ZNW* 105, no. 1 (2014): 126.

[41] Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, 202 concluded that Paul was deliberately open-ended so that Philemon could work out his own expression of Christian love; Barclay, "Dilemma of Christian Slave-Ownership," 175 and passim thought that Paul did not know what to recommend because the social complexities of slave-master relationships did not allow for any satisfactory option; Nordling, "Onesimus Fugitivus," 107 read Paul's oblique language as his effort to gloss over past losses and to present Onesimus "in the best possible light" to charm Philemon; Hans Förster, "Die Bitte des Paulus für den Sklaven Onesimus:

The various proposals regarding Paul's request and expectations of manumission have the collective effect, whether intended or not, of centering Onesimus' identity as a "slave." They treat this as his fundamental social identity when he returned to Philemon. However, this was the precise identity that Paul negates. Onesimus was *no longer* a slave (Phlm 16). Paul's rhetoric throughout the body of Phlm (vv. 10–16) belabors the point that Onesimus is a fundamentally different person when returning to Philemon. For Paul, slavery was no longer the defining element of Onesimus' relationship with Philemon. Paul does not address the question of slavery or manumission because, in his mind, Onesimus and Philemon no longer have a slave-master relationship, regardless of Onesimus' actual legal status or past relationship with Philemon. The question of manumission, which has become *the* question in scholarship on Phlm, was of marginal concern for Paul when he wrote the letter. Believers' new identity, constructed "in Christ," relativized any social role, including those of slave or master.[42] Paul elsewhere notes his general disregard for believers' prior legal status in light of relationships formed in and with Christ (Cor 7:17–24; Gal 3:28). Onesimus, regardless of his legal or employment status, was now in Christ, and thus defined by his association with the risen Lord and his community. Onesimus' conversion formed a new theological reality and corresponding social identity. When Onesimus returned, his *primary* social identity within Philemon's household was not manifestly to be as a "slave."

Allen Callahan noted the letter's deemphasis on Onesimus' servile identity and proposed an alternative reading—Onesimus was not Philemon's breathing chattel, but his estranged brother.[43] Thus, in his reading of Phlm 16, δοῦλος symbolically refers to natal alienation or familial antitype, and ἀδελφός means literal kinship. This novel reading swings the pendulum regarding Onesimus' identity upon his return.[44] Whereas most proposals assume that

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Semantische und syntaktische Überlegungen zum Philemonbrief," *NovT* 60, no. 3 (2018): 268–89 emphasized that Paul expects Philemon to relate to Onesimus as a human instead of a serviceable "thing"; Head, "Onesimus the Letter Carrier," 647–49 argued that this letter of recommendation only initiates the conversation to provide Onesimus with an opportunity to argue his own case for freedom and resolve the issue directly with Philemon.

[42] Barclay, "Κοινωνια and the Social Dynamics of the Letter to Philemon"; Marianne Meye Thompson, *Colossians and Philemon*, THNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 198; Michael Wolter, "Philemon as Ethical Counterpart of Paul's Doctrine of Justification," in *Philemon in Perspective: Interpreting a Pauline Letter*, ed. D. Francois Tolmie (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 175–79.

[43] Callahan, "Paul's Epistle to Philemon," 369–72.

[44] Callahan's reading has not been adopted, perhaps because it complicates more than clarifies Phlm. Callahan does not adequately explain Paul's language of "useless/useful," the reason for introducing this

Onesimus was *still* a slave, Callahan proposed that Onesimus was *never* a slave. Whereas Paul splits the difference and asserts that Onesimus was *no longer* a slave. Both the conventional view and Callahan's alternative presume that Onesimus maintained the same fundamental identity, as either a legal slave or a literal brother, during both of Onesimus' travel events. Paul, however, distinguishes the two phases and changes Onesimus' primary relational identity within the triangular relationship. At the time of his departure from Philemon, Onesimus was primarily a slave before his master. However, now, at the time of his second travel event back to Philemon, Onesimus returns not as a "slave." Paul presents alternative social categories for the person of Onesimus, as reflected in the form and rhetoric of his letter to Philemon.

Our principal evidence for discerning Onesimus' mobile identity when returning to Philemon is the Pauline letter that he transported.[45] The form and intention of the letter shape Onesimus' mobile identity and define the meaning of Onesimus' return. Thus, to interpret Onesimus' return travel, we must attend to the literary form and intentions of Phlm. The literary critic Barbara Johnson developed Derrida's notion of "frame of reference." The idea refers to the conceptual borders placed around a text that enable its function.[46] The frame placed around a text controls what we see in the subject and shapes its meaning, yet remains largely unnoticed and unexamined. This critical approach elucidates how interpretative frameworks placed around the text of Phlm define our subject—the meaning of Onesimus' return.

An interpretative frame commonly applied to Philemon is ancient letters that discuss how masters treated runaway slaves. For example, in *NewDocs* 6, Llewelyn juxtaposes two such papyri discussing fugitives, under the section heading, "A Petition Concerning a Runaway: Paul's Letter to Philemon."[47] Such a juxtaposition creates a frame of reference that presumes a particular mobile identity for Onesimus. He is a runaway slave being returned.

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metaphorical sense of "slave," and an uncommon literal usage of "brother." For additional critiques, see Mitchell, "John Chrysostom on Philemon," 147 fn. 47; Head, "Onesimus the Letter Carrier," 634 fn. 14.

[45] For the case that Onesimus was the letter carrier of Phlm, see Head, "Onesimus the Letter Carrier," 636–43.

[46] Barbara Johnson, "The Frame of Reference: Poe, Lacan, Derrida.," *Yale French Studies* 55/56 (1978): 457–505; Campbell, *Framing Paul* has since leveraged this concept for his historical construction of Paul.

[47] *PTurner* 41, *P. Mich. Zen.* 18. S. R. Llewelyn, *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity*, vol. 6 (Australia: Macquarie University, 1992), 55–60.

The most celebrated ancient letter with which scholars frame Philemon is Pliny's missive to Sabinianus (*Ep*. 9.21).[48] The Roman governor petitioned his friend to gently receive his beggarly freedman:

> The freedman of yours with whom you said you were angry has been to me, flung himself at my feet, and clung to me as if I were you. He begged my help with many tears, though he left a good deal unsaid; in short, he convinced me of his genuine penitence. I believe he has reformed, because he realizes he did wrong. You are angry, I know, and I know too that your anger was deserved, but mercy wins most praise when there was just cause for anger. You loved the man once, and I hope you will love him again, but it is sufficient for the moment if you allow yourself to be appeased.[49]

When biblical scholars read Phlm alongside Pliny's letter, the two authors share a common purpose.[50] Like Pliny, Paul intervenes and returns a runaway to his master. However, the letters are different in several crucial ways. One, Pliny intercedes on behalf of a "freedman" (*libertus*), not a slave (δοῦλος/*servus*) as did Paul. Two, the letters have distinctive contents, as Knox observed.[51] Pliny, as one would expect in such a letter, belabors the protégé's penitence and appeals to the master's indulgence, but Paul mentions neither. Three, and perhaps most strikingly, the general tenor of the triangular relationships in the two letters differ starkly. Pliny's letter emphasizes the social disparity, even dominance, between actants. The freedman pathetically begs; the owner bears the right to avenge with violence; and the author scolds the runaway into submission. Paul's letter to Philemon, in contrast, presents the three figures more as co-participants within a mutual triangular relationship, akin to brothers in a family (vv. 7, 16, 20). Philemon stands to benefit from Onesimus (v. 11); Paul views Onesimus as himself (v. 17, 21); and Onesimus' return advances Paul and Philemon's reciprocal relationship (vv. 18–20). Such differences have been attributed to

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[48] Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 3 opens his monograph with Pliny's letter to set the context for Paul's letter to Philemon; Barclay, "Dilemma of Christian Slave-Ownership," 174 introduces Pliny's letter as "the closest parallel to [Phlm] in classical literature"; Knox, *Philemon Among the Letters of Paul*, 1–2 says that "we are very fortunate" to have Pliny's letter, "the purpose of which is clearly the same" as Phlm; Kreitzer, *Philemon*, 6–7 traces the reception history of commentators juxtaposing Pliny's letter with Phlm.

[49] Trans. LCL.

[50] Nordling, "Onesimus Fugitivus," 100.

[51] Knox, *Philemon Among the Letters of Paul*, 4, 15–18; see also Young, *Our Brother Beloved*, 29–31.

Paul's moral or religious superiority,[52] as though both authors addressed the same scenario of returning a runaway slave, just from distinctive outlooks.[53] However, the differences call into question whether Paul and Pliny were actually responding to the analogous situations with similar letters. Pliny's letter and Phlm are comparable only when one assumes *a priori* that Phlm was a runaway slave, which becomes a circular argument with the conclusion framing the textual evidence. In sum, letters for returning runaways, such as Pliny's letter to Sabinianus, can be counterproductive for interpreting Phlm, as they misframe Onesimus' return.

The form of Phlm more closely imitates another type of ancient letter, which can more aptly reframe Paul's epistolary purpose and the meaning of Onesimus' return. Paul's letter to Philemon matches the structure and language of ancient letters of commendation. From an analysis of Greek letters of recommendation among papyri, Chan-Hie Kim identified the three basic structural units of the commendation formulae. They are: (1) a petition verb that introduces the person commended; (2) the background credentials of the letter carrier, in terms of family relationships to invoke a more favorable response; and (3) the requested favor, often marked by the participle οὖν.[54] These three elements appear in order in the body of Phlm. In verse 10, Paul introduces his request, "I petition you regarding my child" (παρακαλῶ σε περὶ τοῦ ἐμοῦ τέκνου). Then he provides a series of five consecutive credentialing identifiers for Onesimus (v. 10–13), which commend him in relationship to Paul, as was standard in letters of commendation.[55] Phlm 17 concludes the formula with the imperatival request ("receive him as me"), introduced by the characteristic participle οὖν. In addition to these structural elements, Phlm contains phraseologies similar to commendation letters.[56] For these reasons, Kim concludes, "Philemon is the only Pauline letter of

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[52] F. Forrester Church, "Rhetorical Structure and Design in Paul's Letter to Philemon," *HTR* 71, no. 1–2 (1978): 32–32 sees in the contrasting rhetoric evidence that Paul "has seized an opportunity to instruct an entire community in the principle of practical Christian love"; Knox, *Philemon Among the Letters of Paul*, 3 says the differences "lead us to suspect a rather deeper purpose in the letter."

[53] Nordling, "Onesimus Fugitivus," 99–106.

[54] Chan-Hie Kim, *Form and Structure of the Familiar Greek Letter of Recommendation* (Missoula, MT: Society of Biblical Literature, 1972), 35–88.

[55] (1) ὃν ἐγέννησα, (2) τόν ποτέ σοι ἄχρηστον νυνὶ δὲ σοὶ καὶ ἐμοὶ εὔχρηστον, (3) ὃν ἀνέπεμψά σοι αὐτόν, (4) τοῦτ' ἔστιν τὰ ἐμὰ σπλάγχνα, and (5) ὃν ἐγὼ ἐβουλόμην πρὸς ἐμαυτὸν κατέχειν.

[56] Kim, *Letter of Recommendation*, 124–28 notes the similar phraseologies: παρακαλῶ σε περὶ (v. 10), χρηστόν (v. 11), εἰ οὖν to introduce a request (v. 17), ὡς ἐμέ (v. 17), τοῦτο ἐμοὶ ἐλλόγα (v. 19), and χαρίζομαι (v. 22).

commendation that has been handed down to us intact."[57] This epistolary form provides an apt frame of reference for interpreting Onesimus' return. In that case, we can then ask: Why did Paul choose the epistolary form of a recommendation letter to structure his communication with Philemon, and what might it suggest about Onesimus' identity and travel?

The fact that Phlm adheres to the pattern of ancient letters of recommendation does not itself preclude Onesimus from being a returned slave. Several interpreters have identified Phlm as a commendation letter and still reconstructed the situation as the return of a runaway slave.[58] However, the literary form opens the possibility that Paul imagined the relationship between Philemon and Onesimus as something besides, or more than, a master-slave dyad. Cicero, for example, used commendation letters to influence a range of dyadic relationships: client–patron, defendant–judge, entrepreneur–businessperson, debtor–creditor, and traveler–host.[59]

The standardized form of commendation letters served a regular function in antiquity. When commending the letter carrier to the letter recipient and requesting a favor on his behalf, the letter author curated and managed triangular relationships across a distance. Letters of commendation were not merely to introduce the courier to the recipient. As was the case with Philemon and Onesimus, the recipient and carrier often already knew each other.[60] The purpose of commendations letters was to fashion the relationship between the two parties as per the author's preferences. Commendation letters created a new social arrangement, often some form of reciprocal relationship.[61] The formulaic letters could configure mutual obligations and triangulate friendships.[62] Within relational networks of patronage, effective

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[57] Kim, *Letter of Recommendation*, 123.
[58] Jerome, *Comm. on Philemon*, preface and vv. 1–3; Chrysostom, *Homily on Philemon*, preface; Head, "Onesimus the Letter Carrier," 644–49.
[59] The seventy-eight *litterae commendaticiae* in Book XIII of Cicero's *Letters to His Friends* illustrates the variety of social arrangements for which the epistolary form could be used; see Roger Rees, "Letters of Recommendation and the Rhetoric of Praise," in *Ancient Letters: Classical and Late Antique Epistolography*, ed. Ruth Morello and A. D. Morrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 149–68.
[60] In other examples, Paul commended people whom the recipients already knew (1 Cor 16:10, 15–18; Phil 2:28–29); Polycarp repeats his prior commendation of Crescens to the Philippians (Pol. *Phil*. 14.1); Antiochus IV commended his publicly known son to the Jewish nation (2 Macc 9:19–27).
[61] For an analysis that moves beyond the conventional analyses of structure and form to examine the contextual and social aspects, see David I. Yoon, "Ancient Letters of Recommendation and 2 Corinthians 3.1-3: A Literary Analysis," *JGRChJ* 12 (2016): 45–72.
[62] Rees, "Letters of Recommendation," 159.

commendation letters facilitated social exchange among all three parties.[63] The primary context for letters of commendation was travel.[64] The letter carrier moved away from the author's location. That socio-physical dislocation necessitated new relational ties within the letter recipient's context. The letters aim to fashion a new relationship to help the mobile person obtain domestic hospitality, material assistance, and/or social acceptance in a foreign location.[65] This function of commendation letters fits with Philemon's persona as a host (§4.3–5) and illuminates the function of Paul's letter to Philemon. He seems to configure a new social arrangement in which Philemon would host and accommodate Onesimus. But, to what end did Paul request hospitality from Philemon for Onesimus?

Other Pauline epistles indicate that he had a regular practice of commending his ministry associates to the letter recipients (Rom 16:1–2; 1 Cor 16:15–18; Phil 2:29–30; 1 Thess 5:12–13). He would introduce them as co-workers in his apostolic ministry so that they would be appropriately welcomed, hosted, and sent by the letter recipients. While Paul was coordinating itinerant ministry throughout the province of Asia (see §4.1), this would have been a frequent practice for him to commend such ministers traveling out. In this light, the letter of Phlm appears to commend Onesimus to Philemon as a traveling minister to be hosted and supported. Philemon would have been inclined to regard Onesimus as his slave, but Paul, through the commendation letter, reconfigures Onesimus as an itinerant minister who requires travel assistance from Philemon. In vv. 17–18, Paul wanted Philemon to receive Onesimus as a Pauline associate, an itinerant representative of the apostle himself. This reading of Phlm and Onesimus' return resolves the longstanding conundrum that introduced this section—the apparent opacity of Paul's actual request from Philemon. Paul provides no clear answer regarding manumission because his letter has another (more apparent) purpose

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[63] Rees, "Letters of Recommendation," 167.

[64] Harrill, *Slaves in the New Testament*, 14–16, based on parallels with journeyman apprentice contracts in Roman Egypt, proposes that Phlm is a letter of recommendation in that Paul "recommends Onesimus for apprenticeship in the service of the gospel" as a slave. However, this approach mistakes lexical parallels as evidence of a common form and fails to account for Paul's mention that Onesimus is no longer a slave. For further critique, see Young, *Our Brother Beloved*, 48–54.

[65] A short Greek letter from Roman Egypt, dated 25 CE (*P. Oxy.* 292) offers an example: "Theon to his most esteemed Tyrannus, heartiest greetings. Heraclides, the bearer of this letter to you, is my brother. Therefore I beg you with all my power to hold him as one recommended to you. I have also asked Hermias my brother in writing to communicate with you regarding this. You will do me the greatest favour if he [Heraclides] gains your notice. But above all I pray that you may be in health unharmed by the evil eye and faring prosperously. Goodbye." (Trans. George Milligan, *Selections from the Greek Papyri* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912], 37–38.)

in writing Phlm. He asks Philemon to "welcome" and "refresh" Onesimus, two references to the act of extending hospitality to traveling guests.[66] Paul amplified Philemon's reputation for extending hospitality (Phlm 7) in order to set up his principal request—that Philemon would host another Christian traveler commended by Paul as an itinerant gospel worker.

Paul's request for Philemon to host his own slave seems counterintuitive and perhaps implausible. How could a master welcome and extend hospitality to his own servile property who already works and lives in the house? A slave is most certainly not a guest! Though apparently strange, Paul's request is part of his broader strategy of reconstituting Onesimus before Philemon as someone "more than a slave" (v. 16). He wanted Philemon to welcome Onesimus as a "brother" and as someone on par with the apostle himself. Paul asked Philemon to "welcome him as you would welcome me" (προσλαβοῦ αὐτὸν ὡς ἐμέ, v. 18; cf. v. 20). This request for hospitality is part of Paul's case pushing Philemon to relate to Onesimus on new terms, as a new and different person. He is now someone worthy of hospitality, not a slave. The act of extending hospitality to Onesimus, acknowledging him as a guest, would confirm his new identity in Philemon's household and the Colossian community, as Paul desired. The strange and counterintuitive request to host one's slave was part of Paul's community-shaping strategy.

This interpretation of Onesimus' return does not negate Philemon's legal status or the social complexities of their past relationship, but notes Onesimus' primary social identity when returning to Philemon. Paul surely sensed how their former master-slave relationship, with its implicit obligations and hierarchical patterns, would complicate Philemon's response. Thus, he employs extensive and deft rhetoric in redefining Onesimus. Phlm is often noted for its brevity within the Pauline corpus, but its remarkable length as a commendation letter indicates the complexity and sensitivity of the relational dynamics involved. Onesimus is not just any traveler, but one who happens to be a past slave. Recognizing this, Paul goes to great lengths to downplay and even negate Onesimus' "slave" identity. His recommendation letter presents Onesimus as a new and different person, thus pushing Philemon, as far as possible,

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[66] The verb προσλαμβάνω refers to the host's initial reception of someone into one's home, and thus functions as a synonym for ἀναπαύω by referring to hospitality (2 Macc. 10:25; Acts 28:2). See Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 131. For readings of the verb in light of papyrological evidence, see Cole, "Illustrating a Pauline Imperative (Phlm. 17)." For the meaning of ἀναπαύω in vv. 7 and 20, see §4.3. To these linguistic considerations we could add the earlier discussion about Philemon's ἀγαθόν (v. 14) as alluding to *proxenia*-like hospitality (cf. §4.4).

to relate to Onesimus as more as a "brother" to be hosted than as a slave in his house (Phlm 16). So, what does it mean for Onesimus to be a "brother"?

In Phlm 16, Paul states that Onesimus was returning "no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother" (οὐκέτι ὡς δοῦλον ἀλλὰ ὑπὲρ δοῦλον, ἀδελφὸν ἀγαπητόν). These two contrasting identities—"slave" and "brother"—refer to Onesimus' primary social roles, who he was *in relation* to Philemon. Although the terms involve Onesimus' legal status or religious identity, they foremost connote to his social role and relational obligations within Philemon's household. The particle ὡς suggests a measure of relational subjectivity for Onesimus' identity. Paul disambiguates Onesimus' identities during his two mobile events. He departed a "slave," but now returns to Philemon as "a beloved brother." Commentators have interpreted Paul's familial metaphor as a reference to Onesimus' new religious identity in general. Onesimus had become a saint, a fellow "Christian"[67] sharing in the common brotherhood.[68] The term "brothers" (ἀδελφοί) can refer to Christians generally, but in the structure of Paul's mission, it often refers to a more restricted group of appointed missionaries. In his article, "Paul and His Co-Workers," E. Earle Ellis outlined this narrower meaning of "brother" in Paul.[69] The term "brothers" refers to colleagues who "have the Christian mission and/or ministry as their primary occupation."[70] This raises the possibility that Paul's re-presentation of Philemon as an ἀδελφός refers to his identity not merely as a "fellow believer" or "saint," but more narrowly as an itinerant gospel minister. Four lines of evidence in Phlm support this thesis that Paul sent Onesimus to Philemon as an apostolic worker.

One, in Phlm 13, Paul envisioned a potential third travel event for Onesimus, in which he would return to Paul in order to minister to him. The scenario desired and suggested by Paul reveals the latent ministry dynamics of Onesimus' travel. The prospect of a third journey creates a future for Onesimus that would develop his new identity as a gospel worker within the community. The third journey, if undertaken, would be an implicit recognition of Onesimus' new social identity. He would return to Paul as a minister (perhaps while legally remaining a slave) sent by his master. Paul expresses his aspirations for Onesimus' return but

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[67] Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon*, 335.
[68] Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, 203.
[69] E. Earle Ellis, "Paul and His Co-Workers," *NTS* 17, no. 4 (1971): 445–52; Aasgaard, *My Beloved Brothers and Sisters*, 250, 297 generally accepts Ellis' reading.
[70] Ellis, "Paul and His Co-Workers," 447.

leaves the decision to Philemon, appealing to his "goodness" (ἀγαθόν. 14). Paul suggests πρόξενια-like hospitality for the itinerant minister. Paul requests that Philemon, by virtue of his material resources and social connections, authorize and support Onesimus' travel in a third journey back to Paul. The proposal for another travel event develops and fulfills Onesimus' new persona. The fact that Paul proposes a third travel event for ministry purposes supports our reading of Onesimus' second travel event as a gospel worker.

Two, the other NT reference to Onesimus as a "brother" has the specific sense of "minister." In Col 4:7–9, Paul's identifies Onesimus as a "faithful and beloved brother" (v.9). This description echoes the proceeding commendation for Tychicus as "a beloved brother, a faithful minister, and a fellow servant" (ἀγαπητὸς ἀδελφὸς καὶ πιστὸς διάκονος καὶ σύνδουλος ἐν κυρίῳ). In this conjoining, "brother" becomes synonymous with "minister" and "fellow servant"—designations for Pauline associates in ministry (cf. Phil 2:25). Paul commends Tychicus and Onesimus as "brothers" precisely because they travel to Colossae as Paul's messengers and report to the church.

Three, the literary form that Paul uses in Phlm to commend and present Onesimus' return reflects his standard language for dispatching ministry associates. Robert Funk identified the Pauline literary form of "apostolic parousia," a section of his letter that handles travel logistics between him and the recipients.[71] When Paul could not travel and visit a church himself, he dispatched a proxy figure with written communication, which typically promised a future visit. Through this particular form, Paul "made his apostolic authority effective in the churches."[72] The second element of the apostolic parousia—i.e., the emissarial dispatch—consisted of three parts: (1) a dispatch formula ἔπεμψα ("I am sending"), (2) messenger credentials marked by ὅς ("who"), and (3) a ἵνα purpose clause. Funk did not identify a dispatch formula in Philemon, even though the three parts of the emissarial dispatch are present in vv. 10–15.[73] Paul says, "I am sending him to you" (ἀνέπεμψά σοι αὐτόν, v. 12); he offers Onesimus' credentials through a series of relative clauses (vv. 11–13); then purpose clauses explain that the reasons for Onesimus' travel were "that he might be of service to me"

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[71] Robert Funk, "The Apostolic Parousia: Form and Significance," in *Christian History and Interpretation: Studies Presented to John Knox*, ed. W. R. Farmer, C. F. D. Moule, and R. R. Niebuhr (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 249–68.
[72] Funk, "The Apostolic Parousia," 249.
[73] Callahan, "Paul's Epistle to Philemon," 373 makes this observation, though identifies slightly different elements within Phlm than here.

(ἵνα ὑπὲρ σοῦ μοι διακονῇ, v. 13) and "that you might have him back forever" (ἵνα αἰώνιον αὐτὸν ἀπέχῃς, v. 15). Philemon 10-15 mirrors Paul's characteristic formula for sending an apostolic emissary.[74] This literary form in Phlm frames the meaning of Onesimus' return. Paul used his standard emissarial dispatch formula in Phlm to induce Philemon to receive Onesimus as an emissary of Paul.

Finally, we have clues that Onesimus was already involved in such ministry when returning to Philemon. The idea of him laboring in ministry was not merely Paul's aspiration, but an actual reality. Three minor yet significant details in the letters of Col and Phlm indicate that Onesimus was functioning as an itinerant minister. One, Onesimus himself likely carried the letter of Phlm to Colossae.[75] As the courier, Onesimus would have had significant authority to represent Paul as an active agent of ministry.[76] The physical letter itself, apart from its contents or even genre, confers a ministry identity upon Onesimus. The other NT attestation of Onesimus confirms this picture. Onesimus worked alongside Tychicus, himself a "faithful minister and fellow servant," to deliver Paul's letter to the churches in Colossae and Laodicea (Col 4:9).[77] Two, Paul's proposal that Onesimus return to Paul so that he might minister (ἵνα…διακονῇ , v. 13) suggests that Paul had observed some ministry potential in Onesimus. When Paul sent Onesimus back to Philemon, he already had in mind Onesimus' ministry capabilities. This signals that he was already involved in ministry and had proven himself "useful" (v. 11). Three, Paul knew Philemon foremost as a host of his ministry associates in the past. They related through intermediaries whom Paul had sent in the work of the gospel (§4.5). This became the *modus operandi* of the relationship between Paul and Philemon.[78] Paul relates to Philemon not as a master of slaves, but as a host to travelers (vv. 7, 17, 20, 22). Just as he had sent ministers to Colossae in the past, Paul now sends another with this commendation letter. In light of these factors, Onesimus appears to be coming to Philemon as an experienced gospel minister.

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[74] See Rom 15:14–33, 1:8–13; 1 Cor 4:14–21, 16:1–11; 2 Cor 12:14–13:13; Phil 2:19–24; 1 Thess 2:17–3:13.

[75] Head, "Onesimus the Letter Carrier," 642–43.

[76] Margaret M. Mitchell, "New Testament Envoys in the Context of Greco-Roman Diplomatic and Epistolary Conventions: The Example of Timothy and Titus," *JBL*, no. 111 (1992): 649–50.

[77] Even if Colossians were pseudonymous and composed later, our earliest tradition remembers Onesimus as a gospel minister to Colossae.

[78] As a parallel, Cicero maintained a similar sender-receiver relationship with Acilius, the proconsul of Sicily in 46–45 BC, to whom he commended many such friends (see XIII. 30–39).

§5.4 Conclusions

As an extension of the previous chapter about Philemon's persona as a host**,** this chapter has interpreted the two travel events of Onesimus that form the immediate background of Paul's letter to Phlm. We asked the questions: What was the meaning of Onesimus' two journeys? Who was Onesimus when he traveled? To answer these questions, we have assessed historical and literary assumptions that have (mis)framed prior interpretations of Phlm and Onesimus' travel. The focus on Onesimus' travel events affords new angles on the background and text of Phlm. In his first mobile event, Onesimus departed from Philemon to find Paul, a potential *amicus domini* who could mediate their conflict. This travel event reveals something of the nature and extent of early Christian social connections across space. When Paul sent Onesimus back to Philemon, he intended for Philemon to receive Onesimus as a gospel minister. The former slave was to be welcomed and hosted as an itinerant worker. To communicate this point, Paul utilizes the form and function of ancient commendation letters and uses the apostolic parousia formula that introduces Onesimus as his emissary. Then Paul requests that Philemon host ("welcome," "refresh") Onesimus, a fellow worker ("brother") who was already involved in Paul's ministry. So, who was Onesimus? According to Paul's letter, he was most notably a gospel minister. Because Onesimus would need assistance when he traveled to Colossae, Paul wrote a letter to commend him to someone known for hospitality—Philemon, his master.

Onesimus' travel bore and created social meanings. His movement reconfigured the social identities of all three parties. Most notably, Onesimus became a new person through travel. In his relationships with Paul and Philemon, the "slave" assumed new mobile identities as "aspiring reconciler" and "gospel minister." Onesimus could not have assumed such identities had he never departed (or departed but not returned to Colossae). Philemon, along with the broader community in Colossae, would have continued to imagine him as a (departed) slave. Onesimus' return forced them to encounter and recognize his new role within the Pauline mission and network of Christian communities.[79] His relationship with Philemon would get refashioned, from that of master-slave to sender-minister. The fact of Onesimus' return journey (and the prospect of his third travel event) reconfigured him into an itinerant gospel worker, a participant in Christ's unfolding redemption among the nations.

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[79] Petersen, *Rediscovering Paul*, 269–70.

This new Onesimus was constituted through travel. Moreover, Paul and Philemon are configured as senders and receivers within the community because of Onesimus' movements. His initial departure required them to renegotiate the terms of their own relationship. When (and if) Philemon participated in Paul's ministry by welcoming and resending Onesimus, he would expand his partnership with Paul. Onesimus' potential third travel event would be performed on behalf of Philemon (ἵνα ὑπὲρ σοῦ μοι διακονῇ cf. Col 1:7; 4:13). Onesimus, to some degree, would serve as Philemon's agent in Paul's ministry in other cities, creating new relational obligations and roles between separated people.

Onesimus' travel, a meaningful social act within the early Christian community, crafted and performed new social identities. His travel reconfigured people and relations in ways that could not have been accomplished if Onesimus had remained in Colossae. This is the case because ancient travel was hardly self-determinative. Movement was a collective endeavor and socially embedded. Multiple participants had to authorize, subsidize, send, and receive travelers. The multilateral coordination of travel logistics requires mutual agreement on mobile identities and the meaning of travel. In the case of Phlm, Paul frames Onesimus' travel as the mobile performance of shared theological convictions about social identity and worth rooted in Christ.

PART III: Travel Among Ignatian Communities

Chapter 6. Travel in Ignatius' Letters

Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch, was condemned *ad bestias* and marched to Rome in the early second century.[1] His land journey across Asia Minor instigated a flurry of travel among Christian communities. In a short span, Ignatius and the churches traveled an estimated 22,000 kilometers (see Fig. 6.2). Multiple churches invested considerable resources to visit the enchained convict. Ignatius also summoned churches in Asia and Macedonia to visit his church in Syrian Antioch to celebrate their newfound peace. Not since Paul's financial collection for the saints in Jerusalem do we find such an effort to coordinate travel between Christian communities across the Mediterranean. Fortunately for our task of analyzing early Christian travel, seven letters from Ignatius bear witness to the burst of wide-ranging travel.[2]

Ignatius' journey across Asia was highlighted by Eusebius of Caesarea, the first historian to reconstruct Ignatius' itinerary. After Eusebius introduces Ignatius as a bishop of apostolic

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[1] Eusebius first dated Ignatius' death during Trajan's reign (*HE* 3.34), as affirmed by the Byzantine historian Malalas (Chron. 11.276 = *PG* 97.417B). For considerations in favor of the Trajanic date, see Étienne Decrept, "Circonstances et Interprétations Du Voyage d'Ignace d'Antioche," *Revue Des Sciences Religieuses* 82, no. 3 (2008): 390–93; J. B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers. Part II, S. Ignatius. S. Polycarp*, vol. 1 (London: Macmillan, 1889), 2–22. For a summary and assessment of publications, see Jonathon Lookadoo, "The Date and Authenticity of the Ignatian Letters: An Outline of Recent Discussions," *CBR* 19, no. 1 (2020): 88–114.

[2] This chapter assumes the authenticity of the (seven-letter) middle recension, the general consensus established by Lightfoot and Zahn in the late nineteenth century. Cf. Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers, II.1*, 1:1:70–134, 328–430; Theodor Zahn, *Ignatius von Antiochien* (Gotha: Friedrich Andreas Perthes, 1873), 75–240; Albert O. Mellink, *Death as Eschaton: A Study of Ignatius of Antioch's Desire for Death* (Amsterdam: Vrije Universiteit, 2000), 26–44 presents updated arguments for the seven-letter middle recension; Markus Vinzent, *Writing the History of Early Christianity: From Reception to Retrospection* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 266–409 traces the reception history of Ignatius' letters; Lookadoo, "Date and Authenticity of Ignatian Letters" assesses the conversation since 1997. Because Ignatius wrote the letters in quick succession and they all share the same general character and concerns, I approach the letters as part of a collection. Helmut Koester, *History and Literature of Early Christianity*, vol. 2 (New York: De Gruyter, 2000), 285: "It is therefore justified to treat the letters as a unity insofar as they refer to the same theological and ecclesiastical concerns"; for the case to read each letter individually, see Mikael Isacson, *To Each Their Own Letter: Structure, Themes, & Rhetorical Strategies in the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 2004). Our choice to read Ignatius' epistles as a whole does not negate that they were real letters addressed to particular communities with specific issues. While there are differences in focus throughout the letters, regarding travel and its meaning, the letters all evince a similar set of interpretations. Thus, treating the seven letters as a unity best facilitates this inquiry into the events and meaning of travel attested in Ignatius' letters.

descent and a proponent of orthodoxy, he situates Ignatius' letters within a concise travelogue.

> He was brought through Asia under the strictest guard, strengthening the Christian community by speech and encouragement in every city he stayed. … Thus, while he was in Smyrna where Polycarp was, he wrote one letter to the church at Ephesus, referring to their pastor Onesimus; another to the church at Magnesia on the Meander, in which he refers to Bishop Damas; and another to the church at Tralles, then under the rule of Polybius, as he states. He also wrote to the church of Rome … This he wrote from Smyrna. Later in his journey he wrote the Christians at Philadelphia from Troas, as well as the church at Smyrna, especially Polycarp, the head of the church. (*HE.* 3.36*,* trans. Maier)

While Eusebius' narrative has influenced subsequent analyses of Ignatius,[3] it overlooks many aspects of Ignatius' journey. For example, Eusebius does not discuss travel logistics, the movement of other people to Ignatius, or the churches' subsequent travel to visit Antioch. The travel surrounding Ignatius' journey across Asia Minor was more extensive than Eusebius and subsequent historians have portrayed.

This chapter reconstructs the full extent of travel attested in Ignatius' letters and traces the nature of Christian communities that enabled such travel. The aim is not merely to identify the geography of Ignatius' route but also to catalog the travel performed by other Christians.[4] The detailed reconstruction in this chapter provides our basis for exploring the social and theological dimensions of the churches' travel in the next two chapters.

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[3] Eusebius' geographical reconstruction of Ignatius' life and letters has generally been followed by subsequent interpreters who accept the authenticity of the middle recension, and it remains the basis for the ordering of Ignatius' letters in modern editions; cf. Michael W. Holmes, ed., *The Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 177.

[4] For previous efforts to chart Ignatius' route, see Zahn, *Ignatius von Antiochien*, 250–95; J. B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers. Part II, S. Ignatius. S. Polycarp*, vol. 2 (London: Macmillan, 1885), 31–37; Ramsay, "Roads and Travel," 385–86; J. Ruis–Camps, *The Four Authentic Letters of Ignatius, the Martyr* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1979), 131–34; William R. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1985), 10–11; Concannon, "Assemblages in Ignatius," 73–81.

My analysis of travel in Ignatian networks seeks to untangle the various travel events. We distinguish the churches' travel to Ignatius the prisoner (Ch. 7) and the churches' travel to Syria (Ch. 8) from Ignatius' own journey across Asia.[5] (Figures 6.1 and 6.2 provide a map and chart, respectively, of the travel events.) Though the three types of travel often get blended and discussed together,[6] each has a different social context and meaning, and so they are best interpreted separately.

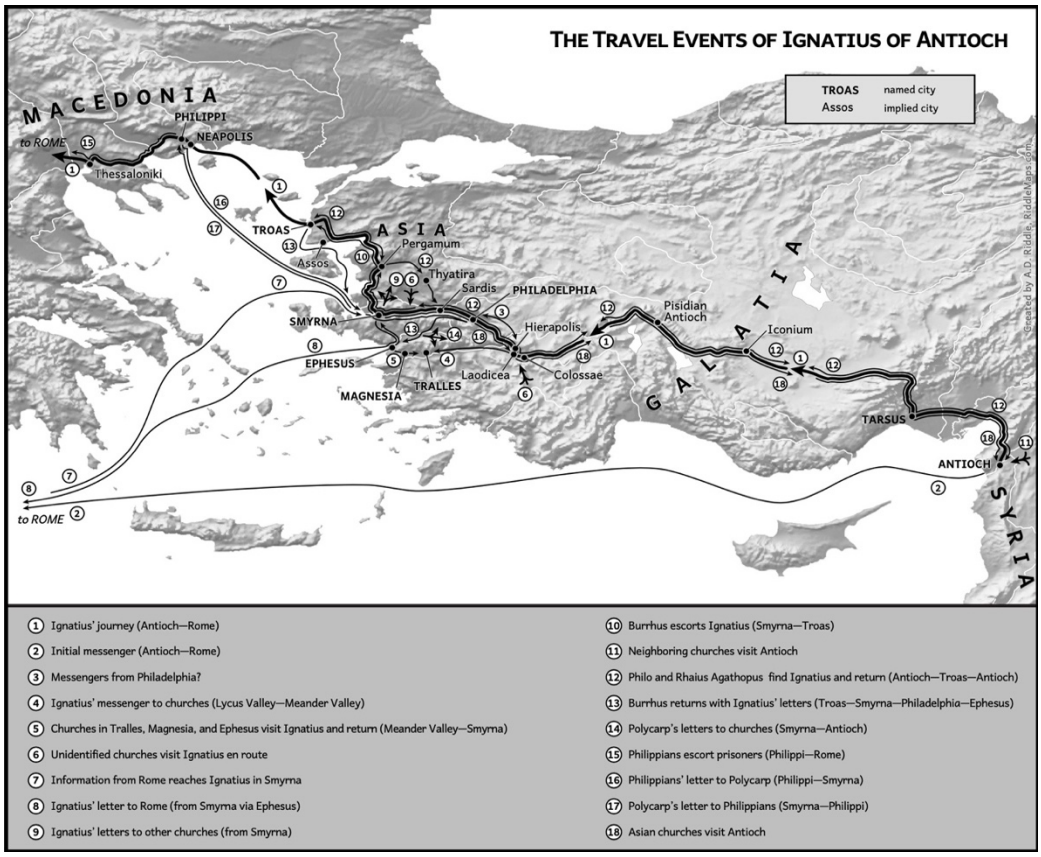

Figure 6.1. Map of Travel in Ignatius' Letters (by A.D. Riddle).

[5] This work does not analyze the meaning of Ignatius' individual journey besides its social implications for the broader churches in Asia, for it is beyond the scope of our focus and has been previously addressed; cf. Katharina Waldner, "Ignatius' Reise von Antiochia nach Rom. Zentralität und locale Vernetzung im christlichen Diskurs des 2. Jahrhunderts," in *In Zentralität und Religion. Zur Formierung urbaner Zentren im Imperium Romanum*, ed. Hubert Cancik, Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 39 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 95–121; Matthew W Mitchell, "In the Footsteps of Paul: Scriptural and Apostolic Authority in Ignatius of Antioch," *JECS* 14, no. 1 (2006): 27–45; Decrept, "Circonstances et Interprétations Du Voyage d'Ignace d'Antioche"; Yonaton Moss, "'From Syria All the Way to Rome': Ignatius of Antioch's Pauline Journey to Christianity," in *Journeys in the Roman East: Imagined and Real*, ed. Maren Niehoff (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 409–22.

[6] For example, Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, trans. Robert A. Kraft (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1971), 62–65; Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 10–13; Allen Brent, *Ignatius of Antioch: A Martyr Bishop and the Origin of Episcopacy* (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 44–70; Concannon, "Assemblages in Ignatius."

	travel event	origin	destination	distance	# of people	total distance
1	Ignatius' Journey	Antioch	Rome	2,917	1	2,917
2	Initial Messenger	Antioch	Rome	2,903	1	2,903
3	Messengers	Philadelphia	Laodicea	91	1	91
4	Ignatius' Messenger	Laodicea	Smyrna	245	1	245
5	Meander Church Visits	Tralles	Smyrna	126	1	126
	same	Magnesia	Smyrna	95	4	380
	same	Ephesus	Smyrna	70	5	350
6	Unidentified Church Visits	??	??	*100	1	100
7	Information about Rome	Rome	Smyrna	2,028	1	2,028
8	Ignatius' Letter to Rome	Smyrna	Ephesus	2,128	1	2,128
9	Letters to Other Churches	Smyrna	??	*200	1	200
10	Burrhus' Escort	Smyrna	Troas	277	1	277
11	Neighboring Churches	Syria/Cilicia	Antioch	*200	1	200
12	Philo and Rhaius Agathopus	Antioch	Troas	1,395	2	2,790
	return	Troas	Antioch	1,393	2	2,786
13	Burrhus Returns	Troas	Ephesus	532	1	532
14	Polycarp's Letters	Smyrna	Asia	*200	1	200
15	Philippians' Escort	Philippi	Rome	1,356	1	1,356
16	Philippian's Letter	Philippi	Smyrna	673	1	673
17	Polycarp's Letter	Smyrna	Philippi	673	1	673
18	Churches' Envoys	Smyrna	Antioch	1,140	1	1,140
	TOTAL					22,095 km

Figure 6.2. Estimated Travel Distances (in km) Related to Ignatius.[7]

§6.1 From Antioch to Smyrna

Ignatius traveled 3,000 kilometers through the Roman provinces of Syria, Galatia, Asia, and Macedonia, and then the Italian peninsula (travel event #1 in Figures 6.1 and 6.2). Whether the social background of Ignatius' arrest involved "external persecution" and/or "internal dissension,"[8] the principal cause and context of Ignatius' journey was his *damnatio ad*

[7] Compiled by author using information from orbis.standford.com and google.com/maps. Asterisks indicate estimates.

[8] The background of Ignatius' conviction and the social situation of the Antioch church are discussed in §8.1, in which I consider the new found "peace" that occasioned churches to visit Syrian Antioch.

bestias. He was escorted from Antioch to die in Rome. Upon his sentence in Antioch, Ignatius sent word about his conviction to the Christians in Rome (travel event #2). Considering that Ignatius expected them to be alive and alongside the Roman Christians when Ignatius wrote he wrote the extant letter to Rome from Smyrna, they were sent to Rome not as condemned Christians, but as Ignatius' advance messengers, perhaps with an initial letter for the church in Rome (*Rom.* 10.2).

From Antioch, the first securely identifiable location on Ignatius' route is the city of Philadelphia in Lydia, a city 130 km inland from Smyrna. There are two possible routes from Antioch to Philadelphia. By sea, the group could have sailed from Antioch to a harbor on the coastal plain of Pamphylia (i.e., Attalia or Side), then walked northwest through Pisidia toward the Lycus Valley. By land, the group could have passed through Cilicia, then north through the Cilician gates and west across the Anatolian plateau along the east-west highway (η κοινή οδός). Acts depicts Paul and his colleagues taking both routes when traveling west from Antioch (by sea: Acts 13:1–14; by land: 15:40–16:8). In the two martyrdom accounts of Ignatius, the Antiochian version says he set sail from Seleucia, while the Rome account says he was conducted through Asia.

While either the land or sea route would have been possible,[9] scholars have generally favored the land route.[10] This seems correct for several reasons. One, Eusebius' early testimony suggests a land journey. His comment—that Ignatius was "brought through Asia" (*E. H.* 3.36)—likely does not reflect a specific historical memory of Ignatius' route, but his awareness of contemporary travel routes in such cases. Two, churches that did not lie on Ignatius' physical route managed to proceed him "from city to city" (*Rom.* 9.3), implying that more churches than just Tralles, Magnesia, and Ephesus were moving across the landscape to

[9] For example, Acts depicts Paul and his colleagues taking both routes when traveling west from Antioch (by sea: Acts 13:1–14; by land: 15:40–16:8). In the two martyrdom accounts of Ignatius, the Antiochian version says he set sail from Seleucia (*Ant. Act. Ign.* 3), while the Rome account says he was conducted through Asia (*Ant. Act. Ign.* 1). Granted, both accounts are fifth-century and have limited historical value, either specifically about Ignatius or for general travel routes, as lines of movement changed after Byzantium became the imperial capital in 324 CE; cf. Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers, II.1*, 1:376–85.

[10] Ramsay, "Roads and Travel," 385; Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers, II.2*, 2:211; Virginia Corwin, *St. Ignatius and Christianity in Antioch* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1960), 15; Ehrman, *Apostolic Fathers*, 204; Concannon, "Assemblages in Ignatius," 72. For authors who favor the sea route, while allowing for both options, see Zahn, *Ignatius von Antiochien*, 253; Paul R. Trebilco, *The Early Christians in Ephesus from Paul to Ignatius* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 628.

visit Ignatius. Three, if they had started sailing by sea to Rome, it is hard to explain why they would disembark in Pamphylia and march north through Asia instead of continuing by ship to Greece and then Italy.[11] Four, Philo of Cilicia and Rhaius Agathopus found Ignatius by going to the inland city of Philadelphia (and not coastal ports), which suggests they knew Ignatius was traveling by land.[12] Five, Ignatius refers to the future messenger to Syria as a "runner of God" (θεοδρόμος, *Pol.* 7.2), imagining they would retrace his route back to Syria by foot, not by boat. Six, presuming that the soldiers escorting Ignatius utilized the imperial transport system to facilitate movement, land travel would was more conducive as it proved access to imperial rest stations and roadside communities from which they could requisition lodging. For this reason, the road across Asia was "the ordinary route for government messages and parties."[13] The likelihood that Ignatius traveled by land through Cilicia, Galatia, and the Lycus Valley broadens the scope of interconnections between early Christian communities associated with Paul.

Ignatius' overland route passed through the Lycus Valley, where the two main routes leading to the coastal cities diverge (cf. Fig. 4.2). Ignatius continued north into the Hermus River valley toward Philadelphia and visited Christians there (*Phil.* 3.1; 6:3–7.2). Opponents in Philadelphia accused Ignatius of receiving reports about the church before his arrival (6.2). While Ignatius denied the accusation, it raises the possibility that the Philadelphians received news about Ignatius before his arrival and then sent people to him (travel event #3).[14] From Philadelphia, Ignatius traveled to Smyrna, most likely through Sardis.

§6.2 Events In Smyrna

[11] Ignatius says he was with the soldiers "on land and sea" (*Rom.* 5.1). But Ignatius seems to be referring to his entire journey, including future portions; cf. Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers, II.1*, 1:211 n.3; Zahn, *Ignatius von Antiochien*, 254.

[12] Though speculative, one scenario explains how they knew where to pursue Ignatius. The officer in command of Ignatius (and other convicts?) would have stopped in Tarsus to report to the governor of Cilicia. Ignatius, as was his custom in other cities, could have then met with the church from which Philo came.

[13] Ramsay, "Roads and Travel," 385.

[14] Zahn, *Ignatius von Antiochien*, 266–71 argues that Ignatius encountered the false teachers from Ephesus in Philadelphia, but he could have equally heard about them from messengers at other points in his journey.

The city of Smyrna did not lie on the principal route from Philadelphia to Troas, which ran from Sardis through Thyatira and Pergamum. This detour through Smyrna was an "unusual feature"[15] and raises the question of how the route was determined. Ignatius did enjoy sufficient leniency in each city to visit Christians and receive guests, but as a convict, he would not have chosen which cities to visit. The actual route would have been dictated by the duties of the guards, such as picking up new prisoners en route.[16]

The fact that Ignatius' group did not visit Ephesus defies ancient travel conventions. The city of Ephesus was the Roman headquarters for Asia and the main transportation hub in the province. With its strategic harbor, Ephesus was considered the "first landing port" for east-west travel through the Roman east.[17] Given that Ephesus was the main hub for connecting with provincial centers, the college of imperial couriers (*tabellarii*) was based there.[18] Such geographic centrality conferred political and cultural importance upon the Ephesians, so they would expect to receive and host travelers.[19]

The Christian community in Ephesus was the most involved and connected with Ignatius. They sent the largest delegation to Ignatius (five people), Ignatius entrusts them to relay his letter to Rome (*Rom.* 10.1), and Ignatius requests that an Ephesian accompany him to Troas (*Eph.* 2.2), perhaps because the Ephesian representative would confer legitimacy in other Asian cities. The importance of Ephesus as a city and the heightened involvement of the Ephesian church suggests Ephesus would have been the normal and expected destination for Ignatius. Though Ignatius may have desired to visit Ephesus,[20] his military escort decided otherwise. His letter to them is unique by virtue of its length and effusive praise for the

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[15] Ramsay, "Roads and Travel," 384.
[16] Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers, II.2*, 2:33; Ramsay, "Roads and Travel," 385.
[17] *Roman Provincial Coinage* VIII.20466, accessed at https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/type/20466; the reverse inscription reads: ΕΦΕCΙΩΝ Α ΚΑΤΑΠΛΟΥC.
[18] Stephen Mitchell, *Anatolia: Land, Men, and Gods in Asia Minor, Vol. I: The Celts and the Impact of Roman Rule* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 129; cf. *I. Eph.* 2200 A, 4112.
[19] Even within the network of early Christian communities, Ignatius refers to the Ephesian church as a "highway (πάραδος) of those being killed for God's sake" (*Eph.* 12.2), which suggests their centrality and connectivity. Schoedel (*Ignatius of Antioch*, 73) reads this as just a reference to Acts 20:38, when the Ephesian elders bid farewell to Paul in Miletus. However, the road metaphor implies regular traffic, the genitive is plural τῶν εἰς θεὸν ἀναιρουμένων, and Paul bypassed Ephesus in Acts 20. So the imagery seems to refer to Christian martyrs passing through Ephesus, perhaps arrested somewhere in Asia then deported to Rome through the provincial capital.
[20] Trebilco, *Early Christians in Ephesus*, 685.

church,[21] perhaps as a measure to counter the potential slight of bypassing Ephesians and, instead, visiting its rival city of Smyrna (cf. §8.3)

While Ignatius took the northern route to Smyrna, news about him continued west down the Meander River valley (travel event #4), Ignatius appears to have sent a messenger from his party. The churches in Tralles, Magnesia, and Ephesus learned about Ignatius' impending stop in Smyrna, so they sent their bishops and other leaders to Smyrna in order to visit Ignatius (travel event #5).[22] The cities lie in order on the route to Smyrna. The group probably traveled together, with delegates joining Ignatius' messenger as he passed through each city. The closest city to Smyrna (Ephesus) sent five people, while the farthest city (Tralles) sent only their bishop, Polybius (cf. *Eph.* 2.1; *Trall.* 1.1). The difference in numbers may reflect the size and prominence of Ephesus, or simply the challenges of travel for the more distant Trallians.[23]

Additional churches seem to have visited Ignatius, either in Smyrna or in previous cities (travel event #6). He mentions to the Romans that "even churches that did not lie on my way went before me from city to city" (Καὶ γὰρ αἱ μὴ προσήκονσαί μοι τῇ ὁδῷ τῇ κατὰ σάρκα, κατὰ πόλιν με προῆγον; *Rom.* 9.3). This could refer to the three cities that sent delegates to Smyrna.[24] However, the phrase κατὰ πόλιν suggests a more expansive sense; "in every city,"[25] churches went ahead to make preparations for him. In his conclusion to the Magnesians, Ignatius sends his greetings from the Ephesians, Smyrneans, and "all the other churches" (*Magn.* 15). The other churches could not mean the Trallians because their bishop would pass through Magnesia in his return. The evidence suggest that additional, unidentified churches came in contact with Ignatius.

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[21] The Ephesian church is "famous forever" (*Eph.* 8.1) and has "always been in agreement with the apostles" (11.2); Ignatius highlights the Ephesians' connection to their founding apostle, Paul, who remembers them "in every letter" (12.2); Ignatius intended to write a second letter to the Ephesians (20.1). Also, in the conclusion of epistles to other churches, greetings from the Ephesians stand out (*Magn.* 15; *Trall.* 13.1).

[22] They could have learned of Ignatius' arrival via messenger from Smyrna. However, this would require another week for travel, Ignatius mentions how the churches proceed (προῆγον) him to each city (*Rom.* 9.3), and he elsewhere sent messengers in advance (*Rom.* 10.2). See Zahn, *Ignatius von Antiochien*, 257.

[23] In a letter dated July 27, 51 BCE (*Ad Att.* 5.14), Cicero mentions he traveled from Tralles to Ephesus (51 km) in a single day, but his status as a provincial governor would not indicate normal rates of travel.

[24] Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 190.

[25] Cf. Lk 8:1, 4; Acts 15:21; 20:23.

Ignatius' stay in Smyrna appears to have been brief. He notes the brevity of his interactions with the Ephesian bishop (*Eph.* 5.1). Ignatius' convoy probably stopped only to visit the provincial governor and then carry on. A stay of about one week in Smyrna seems plausible.[26] Ignatius did have sufficient time and freedom in Smyrna to become personally acquainted with several households (*Smyrn*. 13; *Pol*. 8.2) and compose four letters from Smyrna (*Eph.* 21.1; *Magn.* 15.1; *Trall.* 12.1; *Rom.* 10.1).

Ignatius sent letters to the three churches that sent delegates: Ephesians, Magnesians, and Trallians. The delegates themselves carried Ignatius' letter back to their respective cities and read them to the community (travel event #9).[27] The three churches likely departed from Smyrna and journeyed home together.[28] Also from Smyrna, Ignatius wrote another letter to the Church in Rome, which he entrusted to the Ephesians to deliver (travel event #8). The fact that he wrote "through the Ephesians" (δι' 'Εφεσίων, plural; *Rom.* 10.1) suggests that more than one person carried the letter; among them, Ignatius commends Crocus in particular (*Rom*. 10.1). The group likely sailed immediately to Rome, for Ignatius intended for the letter to arrive there before himself.

Nothing indicates that Ignatius had previously visited Rome, but his letter does suggest previous communications with the Romans.[29] Ignatius had sent a previous delegation to Rome (*Rom.* 10.2; travel event #2). Ignatius suspected that the Christians in Rome would advocate for him before Roman authorities, which displays a notable degree of personal identification with the convict. Also, news about the Romans' teaching (*Rom.* 3.1) and burial options (*Rom.* 4.2) had somehow reached Ignatius (travel event #7), perhaps through the same messenger he had sent to Rome. Though only one letter has been preserved, Ignatius maintained more extensive connections with the Romans during his journey. The letter to

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[26] Zahn, *Ignatius von Antiochien*, 277 proposes "about ten days."

[27] Trebilco, *Early Christians in Ephesus*, 682 fn. 192.

[28] The Ephesian representatives may have stayed longer than other churches considering the heightened level of support for Ignatius. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 132, 161 suggests this based on the greetings from Ephesus in *Trall.* 13.1 and *Magn.* 15.1.

[29] Brent, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 40 claims that Ignatius did not mention the names of any Romans because he did not know any Christians in Rome. This argument from silence does not hold up. Ignatius' letter to the Philadelphians does not mention any names even though he certainly visited and stayed with them (*Phil.* 3.1; 6:3–7.2).

Rome with instructions for the church was not unique. Ignatius mentions that he was writing "to all the churches" on his route to Rome so they too would not hinder his death (*Rom.* 4.1).[30] During this period of his journey, Ignatius interacted with more churches than just Ephesus, Magnesia, Tralles, and Rome.

§6.3 From Smyrna to Troas

Before departing from Smyrna, Ignatius requested that Burrhus, a deacon who traveled from Ephesus to Smyrna, accompany him on his journey (*Eph.* 2.1). This did, in fact, happen (travel event #10; *Phld*. 11.2; *Smyrn.* 12.1). Rather than waiting for an actual reply from the church in Ephesus,[31] the other four Ephesian leaders present in Smyrna likely approved the expenditures for Burrhus to join Ignatius. The Smyrnaean church also contributed to helping send Burrhus (*Phld.* 11.2). Ignatius does not state his reason for requesting Burrhus' presence,[32] though we know Burrhus did carry Ignatius' letters back to Smyrna and then Philadelphia (*Phld*. 11.2; *Smyrn.* 12.1).[33]

Regarding the route from Smyrna to Troas, Ramsay and Holmes suggest that Ignatius' convoy sailed by sea.[34] However, if sailing from Smyrna, they would have likely sailed straight to Philippi without stopping in Troas. Moreover, the prevailing Etesian winds

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[30] The "churches" mentioned here could have several referents. One, this could refer to the recipients of his letters to the Ephesians, Magnesians, and Trallians (cf. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch,* 175), but Ignatius has in mind churches that he would visit in the future and that might prohibit his death, not past churches. Two, it could refer to the multiple house churches in Rome that would receive his letter, though Ignatius seems to be speaking about churches other than the letter recipients. Three, this could be an unfulfilled intention of Ignatius (cf. Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, II.2, 206, citing *Pol.* 8), but Ignatius writes this from Smyrna, not Troas when he is rushed. Four, they could be unpreserved letters to churches in Troas and Macedonia which he planned to visit en route to Rome. §6.3 discusses the likelihood of additional yet unpreserved letters of Ignatius.

[31] The roundtrip is 144 km and requires five days of travel time.

[32] Options include: cheering the soldiers (Zahn, *Ignatius*, 281), physical protection, emotional encouragement, assistance drafting letters, and carrying letters back to Smyrna. The latter two options seem most probable.

[33] E. Randolph Richards, "Silvanus Was Not Peter's Secretary: Theological Bias In Interpreting Διὰ Σιλουανοῦ …ἔγραψα In 1 Peter 5:12," *JETS* 43, no. 3 (2000): 418–20 demonstrates that γράφω διὰ + genitive in Greco-Roman epistolography (including Ignatius' letters) introduces the courier, not amanuensis.

[34] Ramsay, "Roads and Travel," 385; Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 801 likewise shows Ignatius sailing this leg of the journey.

hindered northbound sailing into Troas from June to September,[35] and Ignatius left Smyrna in late August (cf. *Rom.* 10.3). When traveling to the province of Bithynia as governor in 110, Pliny the Younger was prevented from sailing on a coastal boat from Ephesus to Pergamum because "the prevailing Etesian [northern] winds make it impossible to go all the way by sea."[36] Ignatius was conscious that his route was slower than sea options, as he expected Crocus and the Ephesians to arrive in Rome before himself. The Roman guards perhaps needed to travel by land to acquire other convicts en route to Rome (cf. Pol. *Phil*. 9.1). The absence of firm evidence permits only conjectures, but the land route from Smyrna to Troas seems more likely. In that case, Ignatius could have visited Christians in other cities such as Pergamum and Assos.

As in Smyrna, Ignatius brief stay was long enough to draft and commission letters back to the Philadelphians, the Smyrneans, and Polycarp in Smyrna. Ignatius selected these churches as recipients because Philo and Rhaius Agathopus had passed through those communities. Ignatius' letter thanks them for hosting his co-workers and addresses issues recently reported by them. Ignatius had intended to write "to all the churches" throughout Asia, but had to sail "at once" from Troas (*Pol.* 8.1). As in Smyrna, Ignatius interacted with fellow believers in Troas (*Phil.* 11.2; *Smyrn.* 12.1).

While in Troas, Ignatius received news that "peace" had been restored to his church in Antioch (*Phld*. 10.1; *Smyrn.* 11.2; *Poly*. 7.2). This spurred new travel and communications between the churches and Ignatius. Neighboring churches had soon sent their bishops to congratulate the Antiochians (travel event #11; *Phld.* 10.2). The church in Syria then decided to send messengers to update Ignatius on the situation. Their rationale for such a costly effort was not to change Ignatius' fate, for he was already condemned to death and personally intent on that outcome. The Syrian church sought to provide edifying news to Ignatius, who had left Syria in a state of despair over the unresolved issue (*Eph.* 21.2; *Magn.* 14; *Trall.* 13.1; *Rom.* 9.2). Two people, Rhaius Agathopus (a "chosen man" from Syria) and Philo (a deacon from Cilicia), were selected to track down Ignatius and report the news (travel event #12; *Phld.* 11.1; *Smyrn.* 10.1). Rhaius Agathopus probably traveled from Antioch to Cilicia, whence he

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[35] J. Neumann, "Wind and Current Conditions in the Region of the 'Windy Ilion' (Troy)," *Archäologischer Anzeiger*, 1986, 347–57.

[36] Pliny, *Ep.* X. 15, trans. LCL. Peloponnesian ships (Thuc. 8.80, 99) and Herod (Josephus, *Ant.* 16.16–17) faced the same northerly winds.

traveled with Philo.[37] They possessed some information about Ignatius' route, as they knew to look for him in Philadelphia, where they encountered some opposition due to their association with Ignatius (*Phld.* 11). While tracking down Ignatius, Philo and Rhaius Agathopus learned about the convoy's route from the churches. The Philadelphians knew Ignatius went to Smyrna, and the Smyrneans knew he went to Troas. They effectively crowdsourced Ignatius' itinerary.[38] Philo and Rhaius Agathopus finally catch up with Ignatius in Troas, or some point between Smyrna and Troas.

For Philo and Rhaius Agathopus to have reached Ignatius, they would have had to depart from Antioch soon after Ignatius had departed. At a relaxed rate of 25 km/day, Ignatius' band of shackled prisoners would have traveled the 1422 km overland from Antioch to Troas in 57 days. If Philo and Rhaius traveled at an expedited rate of 35 km/day, they would have arrived in 40 days. Based on this projection, they would have departed from Antioch a few weeks after Ignatius to catch him in Troas. Thus, the "peace" came upon the church in Antioch soon after Ignatius' departure, which suggests that Ignatius' departure somehow resolved the tensions and allowed for "peace."

Upon hearing news about the "peace" in Antioch and the fact that neighboring churches had already visited, Ignatius vigorously campaigns for Asian churches to send delegates to "celebrate" with the church in Antioch. Each of his three letters from Troas provides extended admonitions and instructions for the recipients to connect with the church in Antioch (*Phld*. 10:1–2; *Smyrn.* 11.1–3; *Pol*. 7–8). Because of his own limited time and capacity, Ignatius charges Polycarp in Smyrna to assume the effort by appealing to other churches and organizing the delegation to Antioch (*Pol*. 8.1).[39] Because Philo and Rhaius

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[37] Neither person was a bishop, though Philo of Cilicia appears more prominent. Ignatius mentions Philo first (*Phld.* 11.1; *Smyrn.* 10.1) or only mentions Philo (*Smyrn.* 13.1).

[38] A letter from Roman Egypt illustrates the social collaboration required to track down someone traveling: "As soon as I reached Alexandria, I went off to Valerius; and they told me that he left today. They took the letter so as to send it to the countryside." *P.Oxy.* 59.3988.3–9, discussed in Paul Schubert, *The Bearers of Business Letters in Roman Egypt*, Papyrologica Bruxellensia 41 (Leuven: Peeters, 2021), 26.

[39] Polycarp was to write "ταῖς ἔμπροσθεν ἐκκλησίαις." The spatial meaning of ἔμπροσθεν ("in front", "before") is unclear here. Ehrman translates the phrase "to the churches that lie before me *[Or: "on this side"]*" with a footnote reading, "Possibly referring to the churches that lie between Smyrna and Antioch, or between Troas and Rome" (*Apostolic Fathers,* 319). Lightfoot is probably right that "The writer naturally images himself looking towards Antioch, wither the delegates are to be sent" (*Apostolic Fathers,*

Agathopus transited through Philadelphia and Smyrna, those churches already knew about the "peace" in Antioch prior to Ignatius' letter to them. So, the goal of Ignatius' letter was not merely to inform, but also to interpret the situation in Antioch and mobilize a large-scale, intercommunity response.

Having discussed Ignatius' seven individual letters, we must consider the nature of Ignatius' dossier and its implication for interpreting his travel. Besides the internal data gleamed from Ignatius' seven letters (along with Polycarp's letter to the Philippians), how might the letters as a collective inform us about early Christianity? In his exploration of early Christian orthodoxy and heresy, Walter Bauer ponders why we do not see Ignatius interacting with Christians in cities with known churches, such as Thessalonica, the cities mentioned in John's apocalypse (Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, and Laodicea), or Pauline cities in the Lycus Valley (Colossae, Hierapolis) and interior Galatia (Lycaonia and Pisidia).[40] Based on their absence among Ignatius' letters, Bauer proposes that Ignatius did not approach those churches, either personally or through messengers, because "heretics had maintained, or had come to exercise, leadership there."[41] So, "there was simply no possibility of gaining a hearing there" in those unmentioned churches.[42]

Besides being an argument from silence, Bauer's reconstruction assumes that the reason that no other letters exist is because Ignatius did not write any other letters.[43] However, Ignatius did seem to have written other letters, but only some have been preserved through an incidental historical process. The seven extant letters themselves testify to other Ignatian letters, both real and aspirational (*Eph.* 19.1; *Rom.* 9.3; 10.1; *Pol.* 8.1). Considering the quantity of Ignatius' epistolary output within a short window of time, we would be rightly inclined to suspect he wrote other correspondences at other points of his journey, especially

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II.2, 1.358). In that case, Polycarp should inform the churches "on this side," i.e., within and even east of Asia, including beyond the three communities that visited Ignatius in Smyrna. Meanwhile, Ignatius would continue the same mobilization campaign westward into Europe (cf. Pol. *Phil*. 13.1; Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 280).

[40] Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy* discusses Thessalonica on pp. 74–75 and the other cities on pp. 79–81.

[41] Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy*, 80.

[42] Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy*, 75.

[43] Robert Joly, *Le Dossier d'Ignace d'Antioche* (Brussels: University of Brussels, 1979), 39–46 builds a similar argument upon the absence of letters. For him, the fact that Ignatius did not wrote to Antioch proves the letters are not authentic.

as a person modeling himself after the apostle Paul.[44] So, what happened to those "lost" letters, and why were only seven preserved?

The seven extant letters were all either written from or transported through city of Smyrna. The church in Smyrna (or Polycarp himself) had archived Ignatius' letters, even those not addressed to Smyrna (cf. Pol. *Phil*. 13.2). The Smyrnaeans seemingly expected Ignatius' letters would be valuable enough to later circulate, perhaps among the churches he would solicit to visit Antioch.[45] The Smyrnaeans could only preserve the Ignatian letters that they handled. Additional letters (for example, from Cilicia ahead to Galatia or from Philadelphia back to Colossae) did not pass through Smyrna, and so were not archived there. In short, an association with Smyrna was the most significant factor distinguishing between the extant and lost letters of Ignatius. The city of Philippi also played an important role as recipient and preserver of Ignatius' letter. Though Polycarp wrote many letters,[46] only one has been preserved—his letter to the Philippians sent alongside Ignatius' letters. The Philippian church bears responsibility for preserving the extant letters of Ignatius and Polycarp. Smyrna may have possessed other Ignatian letters, but only those sent from Smyrna to Philippi were preserved.[47] In sum, the absence of letters from Ignatius to other (expected) cities is best explained by the peculiar history of preservation, not ecclesiastical divisions. If Ignatius did write additional "lost" letters, as seems likely, then there were additional epistolary communications and travels even beyond those evidenced in the seven letters.

§6.4 From Troas to Philippi

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[44] In his greeting to the Trallians, Ignatius says he writes "in the apostolic manner." About Ignatius' imitation of Paul, see Robert F. Stoops, "If I Suffer … Epistolary Authority in Ignatius of Antioch," *HTR* 80, no. 2 (1987): 161–78; Mitchell, "In the Footsteps of Paul," 34–36; David L. Eastman, "Paul as Martyr in the Apostolic Fathers," in *The Apostolic Fathers and Paul*, ed. Todd D. Still and David E. White (London: T&T Clark, 2018), 7–14.

[45] On the collection of Ignatius' letters, see Harry Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1997), 109–112.

[46] Ign. *Pol*. 8.1; Pol. *Phil*. 13; *Life of Polycarp* 7; Iren. *Ep. ad Florinus*, *apud* Eus. *HE*5.20.8.

[47] A third plausible "filter" for explaining why only some of Ignatius' letters were preserved is the tendency of early Christians to preserve letters in groups of seven (e.g., Paul's letters to seven churches, the seven catholic epistles, and the seven letters of Rev 2–3) to overcome the particularity of the letters and indicate their universal relevance. The Muratorian Canon mentions this logic. So, any "extra" letters may have been discarded to ensure the proper number. Cf. Harry Y. Gamble, *The New Testament Canon: Its Making and Meaning* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 45, 77.

From Troas, Ignatius and his co-workers parted ways. Burrhus returned toward Smyrna to deliver Ignatius' letters to Smyrna and Philadelphia, presumably sailing with the Etesian winds at his back (travel event #13). Burrhus reached Smyrna and delivered the letters, which were recorded in the local archive. Although we do not have confirmation of a completed trip, Burrhus likely continued on to Philadelphia (cf. *Phld* 11.2) and then home to Ephesus. Burrhus may have taken Ignatius' letter to Polycarp, or it may have been sent later through another person.[48]

After Philo and Rhaius Agathopus' appearance in Troas, they are not mentioned again. They do not appear with Ignatius in Philippi, so they probably returned home to Syria. Because these two "servants of God" (*Smyrn.* 10.1) were returning to Syria, we might consider the possibility that Ignatius charged them with informing and promoting the expedition to Antioch among churches as they returned, perhaps with (unpreserved) letters from Ignatius to churches in cities such as Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Laodicea, and Colossae. Though conjectural, this fits with Ignatius' stated ambitions and pattern of directing others.

Ignatius himself followed Paul's path into Europe (Acts 16:11–12), sailing from Troas to Neopolis, the seaport of Philippi (cf. Pol. *Phil*. 9.1). This appears to have been the first time Ignatius travels by sea.[49] In or before Philippi, two Christians, named Zosimus and Rufus, joined Ignatius (Pol., *Phil*. 9.1; cf. 1.1).[50] Several elements from Polycarp's letter to the Philippians suggest that Ignatius made an impression upon the local Christians staying in Philippi: They welcomed him with honors (1.1), heeded his admonition to congratulate the church in Antioch (13.1), and sought out more of his teachings addressed to others (13.2).

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[48] Zahn, *Ignatius von Antiochien*, 282–83 makes a convincing case for the latter, based on three observations. One, Burrus is not mentioned in the letter to Polycarp. Two, the letter to the Smyrnaeans addressed the bishop, and the letter to Polycarp does not discuss personal information, so there was no need to send two such letters together. Three, Ignatius mentions his occasion for writing Polycarp was that his travel plans had changed, and so he needed Polycarp to assume responsibility for the trip to Syria. If Polycarp wrote two letters, then this implies another travel event from Troas to Smyrna.

[49] 250 km, sailable in about two days, based on ORBIS, https://orbis.stanford.edu/.

[50] Lightfoot hints they were Bithynian Christians, having been sent to Rome by Pliny the governor, but acknowledges, "we can only speculate" (*Apostolic Fathers*, II.237). Zahn believed that Philo and Rhaius Agathopus continued with Ignatius to Philippi and were referred to in Pol. *Phil*. 1.1 (*Ignatius,* 290–91). Though possible, it seems more plausible that Ignatius would deploy them in mobilizing Asian churches to join them in a return to Syria, considering his interest in that undertaking.

The Philippians escorted Ignatius and his fellow prisoners farther east along the Via Ignatia (Pol., *Phil*. 1.1; travel event #15).[51]

While Ignatius was in Philippi, or soon after he left, the Philippians sent two letters to Polycarp in Smyrna: one to congratulate the church in Antioch (Pol. *Phil.* 13.1) and another requesting, from Polycarp, advice about righteousness and copies of Ignatius' letters (3.1; 13.2; travel event #16).[52] In response, Polycarp sent copies of Ignatius' (seven?) letters with a personal cover letter (i.e., his extant letter to the Philippians; travel event #17). The courier of those documents was a certain Crescens, who had made a recent journey to Philippi and whose sister may also visit Philippi (14.1).[53] The one extant letter from Polycarp attests to at least three travel events between Philippi and Smyrna. These regular interactions formed and maintained the network of early Christian communities linked in the Roman east, which Ignatius then Polycarp leveraged to coordinate the churches visit to Antioch (travel event #18).[54]

After Philippi, we lose track of Ignatius. We have no confirmation that he reached Rome as he anticipated, though there is no reason to doubt.[55] If taking the most established route,

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[51] The Philippians had received and helped on their way (δεξαμένοις … καί προπέμφασιν) those in chains. Ehrman translates the latter as "sent ahead" (*Apostolic Fathers*, 333); Lightfoot (*Apostolic Fathers*, II.1, 36) and Zahn (*Ignatius*, 293) see here evidence that the Philippians "escorted" Ignatius.

[52] The language of Pol. *Phil* 13.1 ("Both you and Ignatius have written me that if anyone is traveling to Syria, he should also take along your letter") may infer that Ignatius wrote a second letter to Polycarp (as a sort of recommendation for the Philippians' correspondence, cf. Zahn, *Ignatius*, 288–89), or be referring to the extant letter from Ignatius.

[53] This reconstruction of the travel events around Ignatius supposes that Polycarp's letter was a single document. Interpreters have long noted the discrepancy between Polycarp's statements about Ignatius. In 9.1, Polycarp speaks of Ignatius as a blessed martyr, but in ch. 13, he requests an update from the Philippians, as though he were still alive. P. N. Harrison, *Polycarp's Two Epistles to the Philippians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936) influentially argued that chs. 13–14 and chs. 1–12 represent two distinct letters from Polycarp, fused together in Philippi after Polycarp's death. For an updated bibliography on the issue, see Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers* 276 n. 9. If the letter was a compositive document, it would suggest a deeper level of intercommunication between the churches in Smyrna and Philippi, and, thus, more travel.

[54] Concannon, "'Let Us Know Anything Further Which You Have Heard': Mapping Philippian Connectivity," 201–204.

[55] Early tradition is unanimous regarding his martyrdom. Polycarp expected Ignatius would soon die (Pol. *Phil*. 9.1–2; 13.2). Within a generation, Irenaeus states he was "was condemned to the wild beasts" (*Haer.* 5.28), as was presumed by Eusebius (*HE* 3.36.3). Though dubious in historical details, the fifth-century *Acts of Ignatius' Martyrdom* narrates Ignatius' martyrdom in Rome.

Ignatius would have proceeded west along the Via Egnatia until Dyrrhachium, across the Hadriatic Sea to Brundisium, and then up the Via Appia into Rome.

§6.5 The Travel Logistics of Ignatius' Group

Ignatius' letters allow us to infer some of the logistics of his journey. We consider three topics: Who did Ignatius travel with? How did they find the Christians in each city? Where did they stay? Considering the limited data, our answers are tentative and suggestive.[56] However, in each instance, they add color to the nature of communication and travel among early Christians.

We first consider Ignatius' co-travelers. Burrhus the Ephesian was the only named Christian who traveled along with Ignatius (*Eph.* 2.1; *Phld*. 11.2; *Smyrn.* 12.1), but details suggest Ignatius was accompanied by a number of fellow Christians. If churches proceeded Ignatius to various cities (*Rom*. 9.3; *Phld.* 6.2), they were likely informed by messengers dispatched from Ignatius' presence. Ignatius was likely accompanied by fellow Christians who could go inform other communities, for at least several points of the journey.[57] Also, a squad of ten soldiers (*Rom.* 5.1) is too much for one prisoner; we may assume additional captives besides just Ignatius. Polycarp mentions that the Philippians assisted several Christian prisoners who passed through (*Phil.* 1.1; 9.1). Also, prudent travelers would join with other groups, especially with Roman officials, to ensure their safety from bandits.[58] In addition to those various classes of people, Ignatius' guards may have also been transporting wild beasts,

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[56] Ignatius' letters offer sparse details on these matters and we have few, if any, analogous texts involving the long-distance transport of a condemned prisoner. Acts 27–28 is similar, but that is a Roman citizen going to his sentence before Caesar, not a condemned martyr in waiting. Also, Paul is transported mid-trial to Caesar, so needs to be kept alive; whereas Ignatius was already condemned to death, so would treated accordingly.

[57] Aristarchus, and perhaps "Luke," accompanied Paul the prisoner on his voyage from Palestine to Rome (Acts 27:2). For evidence that he was a friend or religious associate (and not a fellow prisoner or slave) who went voluntarily, see Brian Rapske, "The Importance of Helpers to the Imprisoned Paul in the Book of Acts," *TynBul* 42, no. 1 (1991): 5–13.

[58] "[T]he more cautious among travellers. …waits for a company, either that of an ambassador, or of a quaestor, or of a proconsul, and when he has attached himself to them he travels along the road in safety" (Epictetus, *Diatribai* 4.1.91, trans. Long). See also Blumell, "Beware of Bandits! Banditry and Land Travel in the Roman Empire," 9.

which the prisoners would combat in the Roman *ludi*.[59] Ignatius' was likely in a sizeable entourage of people, including several Christians. He would not have been alone, but interacting with others along the journey.

Ignatius repeatedly managed to find fellow Christians in large cities, and he wasn't the only traveler to do so. Philo and Rhaius Agathopus located Christians in Philadelphia, Smyrna, and Troas (*Phld.* 11.1; *Smyrn.* 10.1; 13.1); messengers found the Christian communities in Tralles, Magnesia, and Ephesus to inform them about events;[60] Ignatius twice expected his messengers to find Christians in Rome (*Rom.* 10.1, 2). The regular communication between the communities suggests that Christians knew how to find one another.[61] Considering that the ancient world did not have a modern-style address system, it is worth pondering how they could find a small group of co-religionists in sizable urban centers like Smyrna and Troas, each with populations of around 100,000 people. Letters from Roman Egypt indicate how messengers managed to find people. Directions written on the back of the letter or a separate piece of paper would mention the physical location where the recipient could be found. For example, "To the gymnasium, for Theon son of Nikoboulos, municipal supplier of oil."[62] For a delivery to Alexandria, a sender details four different landmarks to guide the messenger: "Directions to get to the quarter of Berenikianos, opposite the Nanaion, where Claudianus' bath is located, presently there is a house of the Iulli. There look for Theonammon."[63] In these instances, the sender possessed specific information about the recipient's physical location within the city. The sender acquired this information through direct encounters with the recipient or other network members with such knowledge. When the Christian movement

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[59] Though suggestive, the evidence comes from several sources. One, Ignatius mentions he is fighting with wild beasts and leopards (*Rom*. 5.1); though he identifies the latter as the soldiers, the former might be a literal reference to encountering animals. Two, an inscribed edict of Hadrian links the transport of prisoners and wild animals (δεσμώτας … θηρία; *SEG* 15.1365 l. 32, 129 CE from near Smyrna). Three, gladiatorial games required a regular supply of animals (often from Asia or Africa) along with combatants (e.g., Trajan hosted a spectacle during which 11,000 animals were slain [Dio 68.15.1]). Four, a scene from Apuleius' *Golden Ass* depicts the mutual relationship between criminals, who were supplied as food for the animals to fatten themselves, and the beasts, which were imported from abroad "to entomb the condemned criminals" (4.13).

[60] This is deduced from the fact that these churches someone learned about Ignatius even though he did travel through their cities.

[61] Trebilco, *Early Christians in Ephesus*, 708.

[62] P.Oxy. 2.300 verso, trans. Schubert, *The Bearers of Business Letters in Roman Egypt*, 26–27, which contains several examples; cf. Martial, 1.2.

[63] SB 16.125550, trans. Schubert.

was still linked to Jewish communities, Christian itinerants could have located the local synagogue structure and inquired about their co-religionists. However, after the two ways parted, Christians appear to have developed their own information network to accommodate travel. By Ignatius' era, the churches in each city had identifiable leaders who hosted the community gatherings in their homes and perhaps worked in a public space. Those locations would have been known and shared between Christians. This does not mean that Christian travelers knew fellow Christians in every city, but, as network members, they could access the collective intelligence of the group to learn the locations of Christians in neighboring cities. Christians were able to find one another as they traveled between cities because the personal network of Christian groups stretched across a large geographic area.[64]

The journey across Asia required Ignatius' travel party to find new lodging at each location. The Roman soldiers could have accessed imperial rest stations (*mansiones*) at regular intervals along the primary arteries across Asia. However, in the larger cities, we can observe that Ignatius enjoys significant liberties to engage with fellow Christians: He visits households, receives visitors, hears reports of the churches, and issues letters.[65] This raises the possibility that Ignatius lodged with fellow Christians in those cities. If so, the Christian community also hosted some (or all) of his guards, as Ignatius would not have been given access to his friends without an attending guard. Ignatius states he was bound to the soldiers (*Rom.* 5.1), as was customary.[66] The guards were responsible for prisoners and so watched them closely, even at night.[67] Ignatius mentions that the soldiers guarding him were "well treated" (οἳ καὶ εὐεργετούμενοι, *Rom.* 5.1). Several have read this remark as a reference to the bribes that Christians paid to Ignatius' guards to enjoy visiting privileges.[68] Payments to

[64] Waldner, "Ignatius' Reise von Antiochia nach Rom. Zentralität und locale Vernetzung im christlichen Diskurs des 2. Jahrhunderts," 99.
[65] Zahn, *Ignatius von Antiochien*, 274.
[66] Artemidorus, *On.* 1.48.2 mentions that criminals in prison "can only walk with the guards escorting them." Cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 18.196–98.
[67] The *Digests* compiles rulings from the second and third centuries that guards were accountable before the law for how they custodied prisoners (48.3.10, 12). First-century texts confirm jailors were punished for improperly keeping prisoners (Josephus, *Ant.* 18.233 [18.6.10]; Acts 16:27).
[68] Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers, II.2*, 2:213; Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 179; Carolyn Osiek, "The Ransom of Captives: Evolution of a Tradition," *HTR* 74, no. 4 (1981): 381.

jailors were common in antiquity,[69] especially among early Christians.[70] However, several factors weaken this reading. Most notably, the guards were not working from a fixed location, but were mobile figures passing through the communities. They were themselves displaced outsiders who needed lodging and provisions (cf. Acts 28:13–17). The soldiers were ultimately responsible for the transport and housing of prisoners and, acting in service of the state, they were entitled to requisition such needs.[71] In an edict issued near Smyrna in 129 CE, Hadrian ruled that soldiers could demand billeting and requisition supplies when they were "transporting prisoners or wild animals."[72] It was a pattern for travel groups like Ignatius' to receive lodging from local populations. Ignatius' group could have lodged with Christian communities in the larger cities.[73] The extended greetings to multiple households in Smyrna (*Smyrn.* 13.1–2; *Pol.* 8.2) could also suggest hospitality and lodging from Christian families. In light of these considerations, Ignatius' comments about the guards being "well treated" suggest that Ignatius' party was hosted by the Christian communities.[74] In a parallel account, Paul's escorts appear to have accepted hospitality from Christian communities in their journey to Rome (Acts 28:14).[75] The logistics of the group marching across Asia (i.e., co-travelers, finding people, and lodging) reveals the extant of connectivity between Ignatius and other Christians.

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[69] Acts 24:26; Cicero, *Verr.* 2.5.45; Lucian, *Tox.* 31; Lucian, *Pereg.* 12; Libanius, *Or.* 45 ("Concerning the Prisoners"); *Dig.* 48.3.8.

[70] *Mart. Perpetua* 3.6; *Mart. Pionus* 11; Acts Paul 3.18; Acts Thom. 118, 151; *Didasc. Ap.* 19 (=*Ap. Const*. 5.1.1), an early third-century text that instructs Christians to work diligently so they can pay the wages of guards to secure better treatment for their imprisoned co-religionists.

[71] Mitchell, "Requisitioned Transport"; Brian Rapske, *The Book of Acts and Paul in Roman Custody*, The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting, Vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 272–73 discusses how requisition affected Paul's envoy in Acts 27–28.

[72] *SEG* 15.1365; *ed. pr.*, Tor Hauken and Hasan Malay, "A New Edict of Hadrian from the Province of Asia setting Regulations for Requisitioned Transport," in *Selbstdarstellung und Kommunikation: Die Veröffentlichung staatlicher Urkunden auf Stein und Bronze in der Römischen Welt*, ed. R. Haensch (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2009), 327–48. Two additional fragments of the edict have been identified (*SEG* 28.1120; 62.1179).

[73] The passive participle of εὐεργετέω (εὐεργετούμενοι, "being well treated") would seem to suggest a kindness or favor beyond a mere payment for prison access, but the action being referred to is unclear. The term is broad, but implies some concrete favor. Xenophon uses the same form to refer to the filial benefits/obligations children have to their parents (*Memorabilia* 2.2.3), although in Plato the passive verb refers to "something done" for the guard to gain entrance to Socrates in prison (*Crito* 43a).

[74] The church in Smyrna gathered funds to aid prisoners and ex-convicts (*Smyrn*. 6.2), as seemed common among early Christians.

[75] The "we" could include the centurion Julius, soldiers and other prisoners.

§6.6 Conclusions

This chapter has charted the course of Ignatius' journey and the various travel events it instigated. In all these, we notice "a busy, almost hectic traffic of messengers and letters between the churches in the region."[76] Considering the costs and challenges of ancient travel, the intensity of activity within a brief window of time bears witness to a notable interest in, and capacity for, intercommunal links among Christian communities, especially in Asia, but also stretching in its entirety from Syria to Rome. The letters of Ignatius suggest a considerable number of communications and travel events, even in addition to Ignatius' own journey and the visitations from the stated church delegates. Ignatius refers to "all the churches" three times in his correspondences: "all the other churches" sent their greetings to Magnesia (*Magn.* 15), Ignatius wrote "to all the churches" regarding his death (*Rom.* 4.1), and from Troas he planned to write "to all the churches" (*Pol*. 8.1). Though this phrase was a rhetorical shorthand and was not geographically unbound, in each instance the phrase refers to Christian communities beyond those six which received his extant letters. Ignatius communicated with a broad range of churches by sending epistles and receiving their delegations (*Rom.* 9.1). A multiplicity of interactions should be expected if, as I have proposed, Ignatius' group did take the overland route. The 1,422-kilometer journey from Antioch to Troas would require overnight stays in approximately 57 locations, and we know about his stays in only two cities (Philadelphia and Smyrna). For at least some of the other 55 nights, Ignatius would have lodged with other Christians in the towns of Syria, Galatia, and Cilicia. Besides these connections in the Roman east, we noted Ignatius also maintained ongoing interactions with the church in Rome. The flurry of travel in Ignatius' letters, on the one hand, is remarkable in that it offers a concentrated glimpse into the intense mobility and connectivity of early Christians; yet, on the other hand, the travel is *un*remarkable in that such connection between the churches seemed normal or ordinary. The travel surrounding Ignatius' journey appears hardly unique or unprecedented for the communities involved.

The churches of Asia were not just connected unilaterally with Ignatius; they communicated directly with each other. Three details illustrate such inter-church connectivity. In four letters, Ignatius passes on greetings from one church to another (*Magn.* 15; *Trall.* 13.1; *Phld*. 11.2; *Smyrn.* 12). This suggests the churches in Asia personally knew each other and regularly

[76] Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church*, 112.

communicated.[77] Moreover, the fact that Ignatius and then Philo and Rhaius Agathopus found Christians in consecutive cities suggests that Christians were informed about churches at least in neighboring cities. Finally, Ignatius requested prayer from the churches in Asia for the church in Antioch (*Eph*. 21.2; *Magn*. 14; *Trall.* 13.1; *Rom.* 9.1), which suggests the churches in different places were closely connected.[78] Concannon notes how the embodied act of corporate prayer reinforces the communal network by creating "connections between a heterogeneous set of other Christian collectives."[79] Altogether, this evidence suggests the churches were in regular contact with one another. Ignatius' seven extant letters reveals the degree and nature of Christians' communications within their network of scattered communities.[80] Having established the extent of the churches' interactions, the next chapters shall interpret the meaning of their travel to the prisoner Ignatius (Ch. 7) and his church in Antioch (Ch. 8).

[77] Trebilco, *Early Christians in Ephesus*, 708.
[78] Trebilco, *Early Christians in Ephesus*, 708.
[79] Concannon, "Assemblages in Ignatius," 79, 81.
[80] Concannon, "Assemblages in Ignatius."

Chapter 7. The Churches' Travel to Ignatius

When Ignatius traveled across Asia, he was a convicted prisoner. Roman authorities in Antioch had condemned and sent him to Rome for execution. Ignatius identifies himself to the churches as a condemned prisoner. He says, "I know who I am…I am a convict" (ἐγὼ κατάκριτος*; Eph.* 12.1)[1] and draws repeated attention to his chains,[2] which represented his conviction and condemnation.[3] The burden of wearing heavy manacles, collars, and chains had the effect of encumbering movement and creating a constant clanking noise.[4] Physical bondage made convicts like Ignatius purposefully conspicuous.[5] The iron chains, and their evident effects, would have prompted other people to perceive Ignatius foremost as a "prisoner," a publicly degraded person.[6] His own mobile identity was as one condemned to the beasts in Rome.[7] It was under such circumstances that Christians traveled from the churches of Asia and Syria to visit Ignatius while en route to Rome. Ignatius was a convict,

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[1] Cf. *Trall.* 3.3; *Rom.* 4.3. Ignatius also refers to himself as a prisoner/captive (δεδεμένος; *Trall.* 1.1; *Rom.* 4.3).

[2] *Eph.* 1.2; 3.1; 11.2; 21.2; *Magn*. 1.2; 12.1; *Trall*. 5.2; 10; 12.1; *Rom*. 1.1; *Phld* 5.1; 7.2 *Smyrn*. 4.2; 10.2. 11.1; *Pol*. 2.3; also Pol. *Phil.* 1.1).

[3] The common Greek words for "prisoner" (δέσμιος, δεδεμένος) had the literal meaning of "bound, in bonds." Cf. Artemidorus, *On.* 1.5.4 and 1.42.6, where chains and shackles are a metonym for one's imprisonment.

[4] For the kinds and effects of chains worn by ancient prisoners, see Rapske, *Paul in Roman Custody*, 206–09.

[5] Brent D. Shaw, "Judicial Nightmares and Christian Memory," *JECS* 11, no. 4 (2003): 535: "The Roman state consciously intended its punishments to be public and strikingly visual precisely in order to achieve the terror-effect."

[6] Especially in triumphal processions. For numerous texts on the humiliation of chains, see Wansink, *Chained in Christ*, 48, esp. n. 71.

[7] The transport of condemned criminals to face beasts in another city, including Rome, had a precedent. Cicero criticizes the Macedonian proconsul Piso for sending hundreds of people to an allied priest in order "to be exposed to wild beasts" (*Against Piso*, 36 [89]). Justinian's *Digest* states that Severus and Antoninus decreed that people condemned to the beasts could be transferred to another province only with the Emperor's consent (48.19.31). This rescript suggests the practice was common and needed regulation. For indications that early Christians were condemned to face wild beasts, see Heb 11:37; 2 Tim 4:17; *Herm.* 10.1; *Mart. Pol.* 3–4; *Diog.* 7.7.

and the delegations that traveled to him were visiting a prisoner.[8] Therefore, this chapter aims to interpret the churches' travel to Ignatius alongside the ancient practice of prison visits.[9]

The meaning and practice of prison visits were obvious to the ancients and would have been assumed among the Christian delegates who visited Ignatius, but they are not readily apparent to modern readers.[10] Therefore, reading Ignatius' letters alongside ancient sources helps us better understand the meaning of the churches' visit to Ignatius. Through such a method, this chapter assesses the identity (§7.1), actions (§7.2), risks (§7.3), and motivations (§7.4) of the Christians who traveled to visited Ignatius the prisoner. This reveals the social meanings and theological factors of their travel.

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[8] A common interpretation of the churches' travel was that they were joining in a choreographed religious procession. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 11–12 argues the movements were carefully "staged" to create the appearance of ecclesiastical harmony; the travel was an act of theatre. Philip A. Harland, "Christ-Bearers and Fellow-Initiates: Local Cultural Life and Christian Identity in Ignatius' Letters," *JECS* 11, no. 4 (2003): 481–99 notes the parallels between ancient inscriptions and the processional language in *Eph.* 9.2; 12.2, but connects it to Christians' general self-identity, not their travel to Ignatius. The fullest argument comes from Brent, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 44–70; Allen Brent, "Ignatius of Antioch and the Imperial Cult," *VC* 52, no. 1 (1998): 30–58, which argue that Ignatius' journey was a Roman triumphal procession, and the churches joined Ignatius as an entourage like pagan officials in cultic processions with assigned roles (cf. *IGRR* 4.353, the Pergamum inscription about musical roles in the imperial cult). The co-travelers, as counterparts of official Roman ambassadors on the (*cursus publicus*), promoted Ignatius's vision for a Panhellenic-like *koinon* of *ekklēsiai* among the cities of Asia. Brent's intriguing contextualization of the journey fails to convince for several reasons. One, the cited linguistic parallels between Ignatius' letters and cultic inscriptions seem tenuous. Two, the church representatives do not "accompany" Ignatius as his "entourage," as Brent assumes. Rather, they come to Smyrna to "visit" him, then return home with letters for their congregation. Burrhus' does accompany Ignatius, but this was only for part of the journey (Smyrna–Troas) and was an exception for which Ignatius asked permission. Three, cultic processions were local parades, not extended ambassadorial journeys to Rome. Brent conflates the two social practices, citing data about one as evidence for the other. Four, Ignatius' rhetoric (written after the churches' visit) should not be read as a source for the churches' rationale for visiting him. Ignatius may have viewed his movement as a procession, but that reveals little about the churches' conception of their travel. Plus, the addressees of Ephesians were not "those who joined his procession from Ephesus as 'initiates' in a mystery cult" (p. 72); rather, they were the Christians who remained in Ephesus and did not travel to him, so receive his letter. Overall, the theory about a religious procession seems conjectural, compared to the more concrete scenario of Ignatius being a prisoner whom various churches visited.

[9] For prison visitations in antiquity, see Rapske, "The Importance of Helpers"; Jens-Uwe Krause, *Gefängnisse im Römischen Reich* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1996), 288–91; Wansink, *Chained in Christ*, 78–84, 133–38, 191–92; cf. Matthew Larsen and Mark Letteney, *Ancient Mediterranean Incarceration* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2024).

[10] Wansink, *Chained in Christ*, 11–13; cf. Philostratus assumes his reader understands prison life and says that details were "not of sufficient importance" to merit mentioning (*VA* 7.28).

§7.1 The People Who Visited Ignatius

Ancient prisoners were usually permitted to receive visitors. The most common visitors were relatives, parents and children. In his oration about prison, the fourth-century Antiochian, Libanius, explains how prisoners obtained their basic needs: "Their wives, sisters, daughters, who were supported by them before their imprisonment, must be the ones to support them now" (*Or.* 45.9; cf. *Or*. 20.7). Cicero considered it cruel when Verras' prison guards did not allow parents to access their children in prison. They were "forbidden to bring their own children food and clothing" (*Verr.* 2.5.45; cf. Libanius, *Or.* 26.32). Mothers and fathers slept at the entrance of the prison, hoping to gain permission to enter. The first-century rhetorician, Valerius Maximus, narrates an anecdote about a prison guard who wanted to starve a female convict. When her daughter arrived to visit, the guard carefully checked that she was not bringing any food. However, after the woman survived many days, the guard was startled to learn that the mother had been sustained through the daughter's breast milk (5.4.7).[11] The narrative articulates the ancient trope of a child's obligations to parents, even in the dire circumstances of prison. Visitation was an expression of filial piety.

Friends also visited prisoners. This sacrificial act proved the genuineness of one's friendship. In the case of Apollonius, being a friend meant sharing dangers with the imprisoned person, not deserting or abandoning him (*VA* 7.15.2). Lucian narrates how, when Antiphilus had long laid in prison and confronted death, his friend Demetrius slept near the prison gate to keep him company each night. Such a deed exhibited the bonds of friendship: "Then indeed, more than any other time, he displayed the affection which he had for him, neglecting his own adversities" (*Tox.* 32).[12] Visiting a friend also expressed political solidarity. When the Jewish prince Herod Agrippa was under house arrest in CE 37, his friends and freedmen brought his favorite meals and provided whatever services they could (Josephus, *Ant.* 18.204). Such visitation and care embodied their allegiance. In religious and educational relationships, students would visit their imprisoned philosopher-teacher as a token of their devotion.[13] In all

[11] Pliny tells a similar story as an "example of affection" (*HN* 7.36).

[12] In another story (*Tox.* 18), Lucian mentions how a friend accompanied his condemned friend into exile on an island to support and encourage the prisoner. Such a deed, Lucian concluded, epitomized true Greek friendship.

[13] For example, disciples interacted with John the Baptist during his imprisonment (Matt 11:2–6; 14:2), dedicated students visited the imprisoned philosopher Apollonius (Philostratus, *VA* 7), and Thecla was eager to be with Paul in prison (Acts Paul 3.18).

instances, visiting prisoners expressed a deep relational bond between the captive and the guest. To visit a prison presupposed and solidified a visitor's public identification with the imprisoned.

In light of who visited ancient prisoners, we might consider how the Christians understood themselves when visiting Ignatius the prisoner. Was this a relationship of surrogate family members, or perhaps a bond similar to that of friends and acquaintances? The two are not entirely distinguishable, as both bonds involved tight relational obligations. The Christian visitors were unlikely to view Ignatius as a "friend." For, their bond was not based on previous interactions and the visitors did not stand to benefit from the situation. Their travel to the prisoner was a sort of "filial obligation" (cf. Heb 13:1–3), an expression of fictive kinship. Ignatius commonly referred to his co-religionists, with whom he interacted while a prisoner, as αδελφοί (*Eph.* 16.1; *Rom.* 6.2; *Phld.* 3.3; 5.1; *Smyrn.* 12.1). Lucian offers a wry explanation for why Christians had generously provided for the imprisoned Peregrinus—they were persuaded that "they are all brothers of one another" (*Pereg.* 13). In light of these texts, we surmise that the delegates came to Ignatius the convict because they shared a fictive kinship identity as "Christians," which was expressed and reinforced through the travel. Social identity and physical mobility fueled one another. We note that their travel to Ignatius had only a Christian rationale; their trip was not appended to a business trip. The purpose of their travel was distinctly Christian—to visit an imprisoned Christian as Christians themselves.

The act of visiting a prisoner revealed not only the social identity of the prisoner as fictive kin, but also their character. Expending effort to locate and assist a prisoner reflected a person's piety and virtue. Lucian uses the trope of prison visits as a mark of devotion and commitment (*Tox.* 30). Ignatius likewise believed that physical movement toward him reflected the moral character of the travelers and their community. His opening greeting to the Ephesians praises the churches' virtue expressed through travel:

> I welcomed in God your well-beloved name, which you possess by reason of your righteous nature, characterized by faith in and love of Jesus Christ our Savior. Being imitators of God, once you took on new life through the blood of Jesus Christ you completed perfectly the task so natural to you. For when you heard that

> I was on my way in chains from Syria for the sake of our shared name and hope…you hurried to visit me. (*Eph.* 1.1–2)

Ignatius' statements about their character were linked with the arrival of an envoy from the Ephesian community.[14] Such bodily presence demonstrated their "well-beloved name" which refers to their "personality, character, and worth."[15] In coming to visit him, the Ephesians had accomplished a "task" perfectly and naturally.[16] Their journey manifested their faith in Christ and the righteousness they possessed by nature. Similarly, through Polybius' coming from Tralles, Ignatius received the church's "godly good will" (τὴν κατὰ θεὸν εὔνοιαν) and realized they were imitators of God (*Tral.* 1.1). The churches' concern for Ignatius, expressed through the travel and arrival of their leaders, was an imitation of God's self-giving love for the people. Christ has become their model for personal sacrifice and godly affections toward fellow Christians (*Eph.* 1.1; 10.3; cf. Eph 5:1–2).

Travel to Ignatius also demonstrated the character of the travelers themselves. He commends Philo and Rhaius Agathopus as men of good reputation who had renounced their life (*Phld.* 11.1). Their effort in traveling from Syria to Troas proved they had transferred their allegiances from this world to Christ, and so loved others even more than themselves in this world. Their actions occurred within a divine economy. They followed Ignatius as servants from God and traveled for the sake of God (*Smyrn*. 10.1). Burrhus, as a companion with Ignatius to Troas, was a model of divine service worthy of emulation (*Smyrn.* 12.1). The visitors' willingness to endure physical and social sacrifices reflected the depth of their character and affection for Ignatius. Physical movement manifested their moral qualities.

Love was a specific virtue attributed to the churches' travel to Ignatius. The Ephesians' righteous nature that prompted them to send delegates was characterized by the "love of Jesus Christ" (*Eph* 1.1). Their visit permitted Ignatius to see the congregation "according to love" (*Eph.* 2.1). Through their bishop Polybius, Ignatius "received a living example of [the

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[14] Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 41 states that Ignatius received a report from the bishop concerning them. While likely true, Ignatius here references the arrival of people from Ephesus as the basis of his positive evaluation.

[15] Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers, II.2*, 2:28.

[16] Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 42 notes the parallel construction between 1.1 ("you completed perfectly the task") and 1.2 ("you hurried to visit me"). Similarly, in *Smyrn.* 13.1–3 the "perfect" task was to send delegates to Syria.

Trallians'] love" (*Trall.* 3.2). For Ignatius, love and faith were primary expressions of the Christian life.[17] The act of traveling to him was seen as a practical outworking of early Christians' ethic of love. Love was embodied presence enacted through travel. Coming to visit Ignatius was embodied and corporeal love with real costs and sacrifices. Such love reinforced the unity of the church, as the sending of representatives to greet and support Ignatius was an important manifestation of that unity.[18] In sum, traveling to visit Ignatius reflected the kinship identity and moral qualities of the travelers and their representative communities.

The travel of church delegates to visit Ignatius the convict followed the early Christian praxis of aiding prisoners.[19] Jesus admonished his followers to care for prisoners (Mt 25:36–39, 43–44; cf. Isa 58:6), and the sermon to the Hebrews defined caring for the imprisoned as an act of fraternal love (Ἡ φιλαδελφία μενέτω. … μιμνήσκεσθε τῶν δεσμίων ὡς συνδεδεμένοι; 13:1–3; cf. 10:). This concept was more than paraenesis; it was a common practice. The addressees of Hebrews had "compassion for those in prison" (τοῖς δεσμίοις συνεπαθήσατε; Heb 10:34). Paul regularly had multiple companions with him in prison.[20] By the second century, churches in diverse areas gathered a regular collection on behalf of prisoners,[21] and early Christian narratives regularly mention prison visits to apostles and martyrs.[22] The church in Rome, to which Ignatius sent two messages, seems to have been particularly active in helping Christian prisoners and even paying for their ransom.[23] In sum, early Christians had a "deeply-rooted and continuing religious tradition that proclaim[ed] the priority of ministry of relief to the imprisoned."[24] Two particular texts highlight the regularity of

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[17] The terms appear together 19 times; e.g., *Eph.* 9.1; 20.1; *Rom.* 9.3; *Phld.* 9.2; 11.2; *Smyrn.* inscr.; 6.1; 13.2. For discussion, see Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch,* 24–26.

[18] Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 25.

[19] Osiek, "The Ransom of Captives," 316–23 covers the first several centuries; for Christian practice during the late-antique period, see; Krause, *Gefängnisse im Römischen Reich*.

[20] Phil 2:19–20; 4:21–22; Phlm 10–13; 23–24; Col 4:7–14 cf. Acts 24:23; 28:17–23; cf. J. Andrew Doole, "Was Timothy in Prison with Paul?," *NTS* 65, no. 1 (2019): 59–77.

[21] Ign. *Smyrn*. 6.2; Justin, *Apol.* 1.67; Tert., *Apol.* 39; Aristides, *Apol*. 15:7–8; Lucian, *Pereg.* 13.

[22] Acts Paul 3.18; Acts Thom. 118–19, 151–4; Acts Andr. B.5; *Mart. Perpetua* 3.6; in *Mart. Polycarp* and *Martyrs of Lyon*, Christians were present at the execution and attempted to gather the bones; for prison visits in mid-third-century martyrdom accounts, see *Mart. Pionus* 11; *Mart. Montanus and Lucius* 19.2. The issue garnered fuller teaching in *Didasc. Ap.* 19 (Syria, ca. 230; cf. *Ap. Const*. 5.1) and Cyprian, *Ep.* 5.2 (Carthage, ca. 250).

[23] 1 Clem 55.2; 59:4; Herm., *Man.* 8.10; *Sim.* 1.8; Dionysius, *ep. ad Soter*, *apud* Eus., *HE* 4.23.10.

[24] Osiek, "The Ransom of Captives," 385.

Christians visiting prisoners. In *Eph.* 12.2, Ignatius says that the Ephesians were "a highway (πάραδος) of those being killed for God's sake." The city of Ephesus had become a thoroughfare for condemned Christians. Asia had the densest population of Christians, who, if condemned, would have most likely passed through Ephesus en route to Rome. So, the Ephesian Christians would have had opportunities to assist and accompany convicted Christians in their journey (as the Smyrneans and Philippians did for Ignatius). In *Pereg.* 12–13, Lucian critiques the naivety of Christians who cared for their imprisoned leader Peregrinus. He notes the details of their assistance, such as bringing elaborate meals and collecting funds from Asia to help their imprisoned "hero" Peregrinus. Lucian's account stereotypes Christians for their custom of aiding prisoners. The practice was common enough that the Christian community became publicly known for their efforts to visit prisoners. By Ignatius' time, the visitation of prisoners appears to have been well-established and ordinary for that community. Their visit was hardly exceptional.[25] Assisting captives had become a normalized expression of Christians' social-religious identity. The churches came to Ignatius as fellow kinsman, proving their love and loyalty towards him. So then, what did the visiting church delegates do for Ignatius?

§7.2 The Purpose of Visiting Ignatius

Visitors provided essential emotional and physical support to captives. This help was crucial for survival because ancient prisoners faced miserable conditions. Their spaces were squalid and wretched.[26] Artemidorus said that a dream of being blind was auspicious for a prisoner because then he would "no longer see the horror of his surroundings" (*On.* 1.26.2). Prisoners had little personal hygiene. They wore ragged clothing and had unkempt hair, even to the point of being unrecognizable.[27] Antiphilus, for example, had to brush "the dry matted hair" from his friend's face to reveal his identity (*Tox.* 29). Another issue was the constant darkness.[28] Perpetua mentions she had never been "in such a dark hole" (*Mart. Perpetua* 3;

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[25] Zahn, *Ignatius von Antiochien*, 280.

[26] For descriptions of a prisoner's living conditions, Libanius, *Or.* 45; Lucian, *Tox.* 29–31; Wansink, *Chained in Christ*, 44–95; Krause, *Gefängnisse im Römischen Reich*, 271–315; Rapske, *Paul in Roman Custody*, 195–226; Cecile Bertrand-Dagenbach, ed., *Carcer - prison et privation de liberté dans l'Antiquité classique* (Paris: Marc Bloch–Strasbourg, 2000), 117–220.

[27] Personal filth was a frequent trope in descriptions of ancient prisoners. See Krause, *Gefängnisse im Römischen Reich*, 287.

[28] About darkness in prison, see Wansink, *Chained in Christ*, 33–35.

cf. *C. Th.* 9.3.1). The space was so crowded people could not get proper sleep because they could not even lie down (Libanius, *Or.* 45.8). Regarding food, guards generally did not nourish their wards. Starvation was their opportunity to extort money from prisoners and their visitors. Torture was also a common part of life in prison, often as an easy means for extracting a confession or money from prisoners.[29] The conditions became so degrading and unlivable that some parents would pay prison guards to put an end to the suffering of their children with "one blow of the axe" to the head (Cicero, *Verr.* 2.5.118).[30] Lucian describes the conditions that ancient prisoners faced: "the stench of the room and its stifling air (since many were confined in the same place, cramped for room, and scarcely able to draw breath), the clash of iron, the scanty sleep—all these conditions were difficult and intolerable for such a man" (*Tox.* 29).[31] Ignatius may have been spared some of the miseries of prison life because he was being transported and so was not shackled in a stationary location. Nevertheless, he did bear iron chains and face the standard realities of hunger, distress, and humiliation at the hands of his guards (cf. *Rom.* 5.1), especially as an already-condemned noncitizen.

In the face of agonizing conditions, visitors did several practical things to aid prisoners.[32] They most obviously provided the necessities of food and clothing. Companionship was also crucial. Friends would sleep with the prisoner or near the gate. They would even incriminate themselves to gain access and be physically present. They spoke encouraging words and read aloud together. Visiting friends and family also advocated for the prisoners, pleading for their release and paying ransom money. When freedom was not obtainable, they beseeched and bribed the guards to treat the prisoner with less severity. Through such actions, visitors

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[29] Krause, *Gefängnisse im Römischen Reich*, 291–95.

[30] While such misery has a rhetorical purpose for Lucian and Cicero, their comments do reflect the perceptions and possibilities of ancient prison life.

[31] Diodorus Siculus describes the prison in Alba Fucens, Italy as "a deep underground dungeon, no larger than a nine-couch room, dark, and noisome from the large numbers committed to the place. …. With so many shut up in such close quarters, the poor wretches were reduced to the physical appearance of brutes, and since their food and everything pertaining to their other needs was all foully commingled, a stench so terrible assailed anyone who drew near that it could scarcely be endured" (*History* 31.9.2–3). Dio Cassius records an exception that proves the rule. Tiberius ordered that the Gallus be treated well, with no bonds and regular food, in order to prolong the torment of his public debasement. The postponement of death was, in Dio's mind, "the most terrible part of his punishment" (58.3.5).

[32] Detailed descriptions of visitors helping ancient prisoners appear in *Didascalia Apostolorum* 19 (an early 3C Christian document from Syria) and two of Lucian's works, *Toxaris* 29–32 and *Peregrinus* 12–13 (ca. 160 CE). This paragraph synthesizes the main forms of help mentioned in these three texts.

"sought to make the experience of imprisonment as tolerable and comfortable as was possible."[33]

What did Ignatius' visitors do for him? They obviously traveled to him and were present with him. We know they gave encouraging reports to Ignatius about their communities. Philo and Rhaius Agathopus carried a message about Antioch, which brought Ignatius great encouragement. The various visitors presumably slept near Ignatius, perhaps at the homes of the hosting Christians. Burrhus "remained" with Ignatius (*Eph*. 2.1), which implies a regular presence.

The churches appear to have brought financial aid to Ignatius. Based on the formulaic statement about the Smyrnaeans' concern "for the prisoner or the one released" (*Smyrn.* 6.2), the churches collected money to help prisoners like Ignatius. Also, the Romans' initiative to obtain Ignatius' freedom would have required funds, whether for legal expenses or a ransom payment. Other texts suggest a pattern of churches sending funds to imprisoned Christians. Lucian snarks that so much money came to Peregrinus for his imprisonment that he "procured not a little revenue from it" (*Pereg.* 13). The Philippians sent financial resources to the imprisoned Paul through Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25–30; 4:14–15). Considering Ignatius' affinity for Paul (*Eph.* 12.2; *Rom.* 4.3)[34] and Smyrna's connection with Philippi (cf. Pol. *Phil.*), the text and circumstances of Paul's epistle to the Philippians would have been known among the Asian churches as a pattern for their own interactions with Ignatius. If the churches did send funds to Ignatius, the customary purposes would have likely included purchasing food and paying guards for preferential treatment (though Ignatius' letters make no explicit mention of either).

The expense of Ignatius' epistolary communications also deserves attention. Based on Richard's estimated costs of letter production,[35] the total cost of producing Ignatius' seven extant letters was 23 denars, which equaled about 46 days of unskilled labor, or $4,000 in

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[33] Wansink, *Chained in Christ*, 192.

[34] Rudolf Bultmann, "Paul and Ignatius," in *Existence and Faith: Shorter Writings of Rudolf Bultmann*, trans. Schubert M. Ogden (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1961), 267–77; Mitchell, "In the Footsteps of Paul"; David M. Reis, "Following in Paul's Footsteps: *Mimēsis* and Power in Ignatius of Antioch," in *Trajectories through the New Testament and the Apostolic Fathers*, ed. Andrew Gregory and Christopher Tuckett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 288–305.

[35] Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 165–69.

today's terms. This figure includes the duplicates preserved by Polycarp in Smyrna, but excludes the cost of delivery and any other letters that have not been preserved. Because a prisoner in chains would not carry writing supplies, Ignatius would have needed significant financial assistance from the churches to maintain communications at the rate he did. Considering the expenses of travel, material provisions, and communications, the churches' visit to Ignatius was a costly endeavor.

Acquiring the funds necessary for helping ancient prisoners required sacrificial effort. Females might beg or prostitute themselves to support their male relatives in prison.[36] In Lucian's *Toxaris* 18 and 20, male friends would perform manual labor all day to earn money. In *Peregrinus* 13, churches from great distances collected a common fund. The *Didasc. Ap.* 19, exhorts rich Christians to sell land and the poor to fast so they could give to prisoners. These examples highlight the sacrifices required to visit and help a captive such as Ignatius.

In the case of Ignatius, where did the funds come from? Ancient envoys often undertook diplomatic missions at their own expense as people of affluence.[37] This might have been the case, as they were the church leaders, and so were likely wealthier members of the community who could subsidize the visit.[38] Parts of Ignatius' letter, however, indicate that the communities contributed in some capacity. When Ignatius wants Burrhus to accompany him farther from Smyrna, he asks the Ephesian church and later says Burrhus "was sent with me by the Ephesians and Smyrneans" (*Eph.* 2; *Phld.* 11.2). The two communities appear to have financed Burrhus' travel extension. Also, Ignatius sees the visitors as representatives sent from the churches (*Eph.* 2; *Magn.* 2.1; 6.1 *Trall* 1.1; cf. 6.2), which implies their active role in sending members from the community. And the Christians in Smyrna gathered a regular collection on behalf of (current and past) prisoners (*Smyrn.* 6.2). Based on these

[36] Krause, *Gefängnisse im Römischen Reich*, 303–4.
[37] Anthony Bash, *Ambassadors for Christ: An Exploration of Ambassadorial Language in the New Testament* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 62–63.
[38] Harry O. Maier, *The Social Setting of the Ministry as Reflected in the Writings of Hermas, Clement and Ignatius* (Ontario, CA: Wilfrid Laurier Univ. Press, 2002), 151–52, based on Ignatius' letters, Johannine letters, and Apocryphal Acts, see evidence that "an important leadership role is played by the relatively wealthy patron."

factors, the project to visit and assist Ignatius in prison appears to have been a collective effort.[39] The churches gathered funds and sent them to Ignatius as assistance.

The miserable conditions produced tremendous emotional and mental agony for prisoners, even to the point that suicide as a common means of escape.[40] In the face of such despair, visitors brought an essential immaterial resource to prisoners—emotional encouragement. Lucian's example of friendship climaxes with the reviving effect of Demetrius' prison visits. His constant presence brought cheer and consolation (παραμυθέομαι; *Tox.* 31). This alleviated Antiphilus' distress and allowed him to regain strength. A similar effect appears in Christian martyr literature. Visitors comfort and relieve (*refrigerare*) prisoners by bringing emotional consolation (*Mart. Pert. And Felic.* 9.1; *Mart. Montantus and Lucius* 4.7; *Mart. Fructuous* 1.4). Solidarity and companionship provided emotional support that strengthened the prisoners' resolve to live.

Ignatius' effusive language about the visitors indicates that their arrival was a source of considerable encouragement for him. He commonly describes the impact of their visit as a "refreshment" to him. Ignatius greets the Trallians "from Smyrna together with the churches of God that are present with me, people who have refreshed me in every respect, physically as well as spiritually" (οἳ κατὰ πάντα με ἀνέπαυσαν σαρκί τε καὶ πνεύματι; *Trall.* 12.1; cf. *Magn*. 15.1). Ignatius also names certain individuals who "refreshed" him. "Crocus also, who is worthy of God and of you, whom I received as a living example of your love, has refreshed me in every way" (*Eph.* 2.1; cf. *Smyrn.* 12.1).[41] Any prisoner in need of food and basic care required such visitors to "refresh" or "revive" him. Ignatius expresses appreciation for the churches' show of solidarity in visiting him, as it has an encouraging and restorative effect upon him. In every mention of their refreshment, Ignatius states that the scope of their impact was "in every respect" (κατὰ πάντα). Their visit attended to his physical and emotional well-being. They likely visited him with letters of support and words of encouragement and comfort, along with material and financial aid. Their arrival had the effect of "refreshing" and

[39] The same appears to be the case in the Philippians' contribution to Paul. Their financial gift resulted from a general collection from the community, and Epaphroditus was the person delegated to take the funds.

[40] See Wansink, *Chained in Christ*, 58–61; Krause, *Gefängnisse im Römischen Reich*, 302–3.

[41] As discussed in §4.3, "refresh" is not a technical term for a prison visit, but, instead, a general (Pauline?) term for hospitality towards travelers in need. Ignatius asks the Romans to "refresh" his messengers (*Rom.* 10.2) and commends the Smyrnaeans because they "refreshed" Philo and Rhaius Agathopus (*Smyrn.* 10.1).

sustaining the prisoner's life. This was crucial for Ignatius, as it allowed him to reach Rome, as he so eagerly desired.

Another effect of the delegates' travel to Ignatius was that it allowed the prisoner to "see" the distant churches. The five delegates from Ephesus made the entire community visible to Ignatius (*Eph.* 2.2). He reports to the Trallians that he saw the entire congregation in their bishop, Polybius (*Trall.* 1.1; cf. *Magn.* 2.1). The travelers represent the entire community, and so churches were present with Ignatius through their representative.[42] Travel allowed distant parties to "see" one another.[43] This mediated presence multiplied the encouragement derived from the representatives' travel.

Prisoners' best chance for survival was outside support from visitors. However, regrettably, abandonment was common in antiquity.[44] In a letter from Hellenistic Egypt, a lonely prisoner writes with desperation, "Many times I have written you because I under oppression in prison, being destroyed by hunger, for ten months. … I beg you to not abandon me in prison to such hunger."[45] For Seneca, the mark of a true friend was someone who did not desert you "at the first rattle of the chain" (*Ep.* 9.8). The admonishments in Matt 25:36–44 and Heb 13:1–3 for Christians to remember those in prison suggest a certain hesitancy toward that ministry (cf. Matt 26:69–75). Paul was alone at his first trial in Rome, as Demas abandoned him in prison because of his love for the world (2 Tim 4:9–10). To highlight his isolation in custody, Paul notes that no one stood by him and that all, without exception, deserted him (οὐδείς μοι παρεγένετο, ἀλλὰ πάντες με ἐγκατέλιπον; 4:16). These examples reflect a harsh reality—friends and family often deserted and forgot about those in prison. Though ancient literature does mention helping inmates, the discussions are often philosophical or fictionalized, pointing to the highest ideal of friendship, not actual prison visits.[46] Ancient prisoners had to realize that friends and family might be reluctant and unwilling to visit.

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[42] Waldner, "Ignatius' Reise von Antiochia nach Rom. Zentralität und locale Vernetzung im christlichen Diskurs des 2. Jahrhunderts," 110.

[43] Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 43 notes this thought was common in Hellenistic letters.

[44] Wansink, *Chained in Christ*, 133–38.

[45] chr.mitt.5 = HGV P.Petr. 3 36 V (a) = Trismegistos 7433. πολλάκ[ις] σοι γέγραφα, διότι καταδεδυναστεύ\ο/μαι ἐν τῆι φυλ[α]κῆι λιμῶι παραπολλύμενος, μῆνές εἰσιν δέκα …ἀξιῶ σε δεόμενος μή με ἀπολέσηι τῶι λιμῶι ἐν τῆι φυλακῆι (trans. mine).

[46] Wansink, *Chained in Christ,* 134. Ignatius' letters (and the Pauline prison epistles) are unique in that they present real instances of a prison visit from the perspective of the prisoner.

In light of prison's depressing conditions and the frequency of abandonment, Ignatius surely worried about whether he would be abandoned, perhaps even recalling the Apostle Paul's own experiences of abandonment. However, Ignatius is met with a parade of visitors from multiple churches. The churches had chosen to join with the condemned bishop of Antioch rather than abandon him. Perhaps some churches did play it safe and disassociated themselves from Ignatius. However, we know that a number of churches did visit the prisoner. Rather than ignoring him, they demonstrate their solidarity with a fellow Christ-follower through public association, even at great material cost to themselves.[47] Their visit would have alleviated Ignatius' miserable conditions, provided financial support, brought emotional encouragement, and allowed him to see the churches.

§7.3 The Risks of Visiting Ignatius

In addition to the material expenses of visiting and helping the convict Ignatius, the visitors faced notable social costs. Visiting prisoners involved two main risks: guilt by association and shame by association. Connection with a condemned person created a fear of becoming implicated and the threat of social disgrace. The risks assumed by travelers relate to the social meaning of their movement, so they are discussed in the context of the churches visit to Ignatius.

People who visited prisoners faced threats to their safety and well-being because of guilt by association.[48] Because of their relational connection, the visitors could be condemned and share the fate of the person whom they were visiting. Eusebius notes that various Christians who visited Christians in prisoner were likewise condemned to death. Agapius and Dionysius irked the Roman governor because they frequently visited Christians in prison. So, they were beheaded, alongside the six people whom they attended (Eus., *Mart. Palestine* 3). Some

[47] Philadelphia, Smyrna, and Troas welcomed Ignatius; Tralles, Magnesia, and Ephesians traveled to visited him. For the impact of Christian co-workers remaining with Paul during his Roman imprisonment, see Rapske, "The Importance of Helpers," 29–30.
[48] Rapske, "The Importance of Helpers," 23–25; Wansink, *Chained in Christ*, 134–35.

Christian visitors exposed themselves to danger by openly greeting a prisoner with a kiss.[49] Early Christians were warned to remain distant from immoral Christians who were rightly condemned, lest the visiting Christians suffer alongside the wrongdoer (*Didasc. Ap.* 19). In a pagan example, most of Apollonius' disciples did not follow him to Rome because they were afraid of imprisonment and death at the hands of Nero (*VA* 4.37). Apollonius instructed Damis, his loyal student, who visited him in prison, to disguise himself and avoid recognition, lest he be arrested and share Apollonius' fate (7.15).[50] Because of the risk, people became hesitant to visit prisoners; thus, the sacrificial deed was interpreted as proof of genuine friendship. Ignatius' letters do not mention that the visitors faced such legal problems by associating with him, but we should not expect such information in his circumstantial missives. At the least, the visitors were likely concerned about the possibility of being condemned and faced a hostile welcome from Ignatius' guards.

Visitors more commonly risked losing status in their community. Shame by association was a common threat for people who chose to visit socially dishonorable prisoners. For prisoners of the Greco-Roman era, whether war prisoners or condemned criminals, captivity was deliberate humiliation.[51] Solon said thieves should make double payment: both a fine and imprisonment, the latter so they would "live in disgrace for the rest of their lives."[52] The goal of Roman captivity was not rehabilitation or criminal justice, but subjugation and humiliation. This fact was evident in the pageantry of Roman triumphs—the glorious pinnacle of any emperor's career was, in essence, a parade of debased captives.[53] Social criminologist James Gilligan has characterized prison rituals as "total degradation

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[49] Eusebius of Caesarea, *History of the Martyrs in Palestine: Discovered in a Very Ancient Syriac Manuscript*, ed. William Cureton (London: Williams, 1861), 43 l.8 (Seleucus) and 44 l.17 (Julianus); Donald Wayne Riddle, *The Martyrs, a Study in Social Control* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1931), 69–70 (Origen), citing Eus., *HE* vi.6.3-4.

[50] Also, Dio Cassius reports that Tiberius had innocent people slain because of their friendship with a prisoner (58.3.7; 58.11.5–7).

[51] The prisoner's shame was a means to enhancing (or restoring) the subjugator's honor. For example, Libanius notes many defendants were imprisoned because the wealthy felt insulted or abused, so fabricated accusations to avenge their honor, as the accused languished and died without a trial (*Or*. 45.3–6). Regarding the shame of prison, see Brian Rapske, "The Shame of Bonds," in *The Book of Acts and Paul in Roman Custody* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 283–312.

[52] Demosthenes, *Against Timocrates* (24), 115

[53] Mary Beard, *The Roman Triumph* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2009); Ryan S. Schellenberg, *Abject Joy: Paul, Prison, and the Art of Making Do* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 93–98.

ceremonies."[54] Artemidorus' dream interpretations assume prisons were the archetype of shame.[55] In Greco-Roman culture, which maintained paramount concerns about status, prisoners felt tremendous shame. When the Parthians took Herod's brother captive, he refused to endure "the reproach of being in bonds," so he elected to die with honor (Josephus, *Ant.* 15.11). Demosthenes sought to run away from prison "out of shame at the charge under which he lay" (Plutarch, *Dem.* 26.1). The dishonor of prison was intentional and debilitating.

In collectivistic-oriented societies such as those of the ancient Mediterranean, status is a shared commodity. The contagion of shame spreads through relational ties. As a result, people separated themselves from the inevitable disgrace of incarceration to avoid shame by association. Lucian recounts how Antiphilus' friends felt besmirched for having associated with him even *before* the conviction. They abandoned him because they "considered it an act of impiety on their own part if they had ever drunk or eaten with him" (*Tox.* 28). Visiting prisoners exposed a person to the threat of shame. This fact is evident in several Christian texts.[56] The author of 2 Tim combats the natural inclination to feel shame when associating with a prisoner.[57] The mentee Timothy was to not be ashamed of Paul the prisoner. Instead of withdrawing in shame, he was to join with the prisoned apostle in his suffering (Μὴ οὖν ἐπαισχυνθῇς … ἐμὲ τὸν δέσμιον αὐτοῦ, ἀλλὰ συγκακοπάθησον; 1:8). The appeal continues in 1:15–18 with past examples. While some people abandoned the prisoner Paul, Onesiphorus was a notable exception. He "eagerly" sought out Paul and revived him "many times." The stated reason was that he was not ashamed of Paul's chain (τὴν ἅλυσίν μου οὐκ ἐπαισχύνθη; v. 16c). In post-canonical literature, Perpetua's father mentions the prospect of family disgrace as a reason for her to renounce: "Do not give me over to the shame of men" (*Mart. Perpetua* 5.2). If Perpetua was to be condemned as a Christian, extended relatives

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[54] *Violence*, 155.

[55] The same dream (such as being naked) could portend disgrace for the rich, but freedom for prisoners (*On.* 2.3.7; cf. 2.3.4). See also A. Pomeroy, "Status and Status-Concern in the Greco-Roman Dream-Books," *Ancient Society* 22 (1991): 51–74.

[56] Schellenberg, *Abject Joy*, 112–13 proposes that the non-elite poor (e.g., early Christians) were not as impeded by shame when visiting the imprisoned. While they perhaps had less status to lose, certain texts indicate that shame did affect all prison visitors (2 Tim 1:8–12; *Disc. Ap.* 19). John Chrysostom remarked that the poor are less hindered in visiting prisons than the pampered and haughty rich (*Hom. Rom.* 19.8); however, his constant stereotypes and denunciations of the rich make this rhetorical trope a questionable source for social historians.

[57] References to the Pastoral Epistles does not rely upon any particular view of the authorship, as I discuss only the general perceptions of shame and prison among early Christians.

would suffer the social consequences. *Didascalia Apostolorum* recognized the prospect of potential dishonor: "Do not be ashamed to visit them when they are imprisoned," for Christians who visited prisoners would not share in the convict's shame, but partake in the martyr's eternal life (19; cf. *Ap. Const.* 5.2). As pagan and Christian texts indicate, social disgrace was a real cost of visiting prisoners.

The churches in Asia would have sensed shame for associating with Ignatius the convict, whether by hosting or by visiting him. At several points in his letters, Ignatius appears conscious of the visitors' social risks. He commends the fact that the churches did not feel shame and interprets their visit as an honorable action. In the closing greeting of his letter to Smyrna, he thanks his prior hosts, saying, "May my spirit be a ransom on your behalf, and my chains as well, which you did not despise, nor were you ashamed of them. Nor will the perfect help, Jesus Christ, be ashamed of you" (*Smyrn.* 10.2). When Ignatius gave himself over as a community ransom and become a prisoner,[58] the Smyrnaeans did not abandon him. They neither despised nor were ashamed of his chains (οὐχ ὑπερηφανήσατε οὐδὲ ἐπησχύνθητε).[59] They had maintained a mutual identification with, and commitment to, the convict. Ignatius likewise expresses gratitude that Polycarp, rather than experiencing shame, recognized the true significance of his bonds and acted in love (*Pol.* 2.3).[60] After Ignatius commends the Smyrnaeans for not despising him, he adds the resulting corollary: neither will Christ be ashamed of him. The implicit reward here draws the Smyrneans' symbolic movement toward Ignatius into a divine relationship. Their relationship with the prisoner

[58] Ignatius' reference to his chains as ἀντίψυχος, a "ransom" or "expiation" (cf. *Eph.* 8.1; 18.1; 21.1; *Pol.* 2.3; 6.1), presents his imprisonment as a vicarious sacrifice to spare other Christians. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 248 claims that such language reflects the prisoners' insecurities and spiritual inferiority. However, a better explanation is that Ignatius bore shameful consequences as a prisoner for the benefit of the broader community, including those in Asia who were well beyond his hometown of Antioch. 1 Clement indicates that Christians were doing this before Ignatius. "Many among us have had themselves imprisoned, so that they might ransom others" (ὅπως ἑτέρους λυτρώσονται; 1 Clem. 55.1). This does not refer to Christians exchanging themselves for a Christian prisoner, but leaders surrendering themselves to spare the broader community. In the passage, Clement compares this behavior to pagan kings who gave themselves over in times of plague to spare their community and to the Jewish examples of Judith and Esther, leaders who exposed themselves to peril in order to deliver their people from destruction. Ignatius sees his chains and execution as an appeasing sacrifice to alleviate persecution against his community.
[59] This perhaps alludes to Onesiphorus' similar regard for Paul in 2 Tim 1:16. Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers, II.2*, 2:316 notes scribes saw a parallel with 2 Tim 1.16 and interpolated elements into Ignatius' text.
[60] Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 265.

reflects and influences their connection with Christ. The language echoes Mk 8:38//Lk 9:26, but differs in subtle ways. Ignatius flips Jesus' threat (i.e., to be ashamed of) into a promised reward (i.e., to *not* be ashamed of). Also, Ignatius' chains now replace Jesus' words as the rightful object of Christians' honor. Christian fellowship, expressed through the prison visit, nullified the potential shame of association. They have secured a positive eschatological evaluation by not showing contempt for their imprisoned brother. Ignatius' promised reciprocity draws their treatment of Ignatius into a divine economy. The Christian communities receive from Jesus divine honor for granting honor to prisoner on his way to execution. Such language aimed to strengthen the resolve of Christians to subvert the shame of prison and continue practicing their alternative honor code.

In his letter to the Romans, Ignatius boasts how the churches in Asia had welcomed him "in the name of Jesus Christ rather than as a mere transient" (εἰς ὄνομα Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, οὐχ ὡς παροδεύοντα; *Rom.* 9.3). The phrase spotlights the general esteem that the churches granted to Ignatius. He was regarded not as a transient of marginal significance, but as a figure worth the effort (and risk) of travel to greet and visit. In this passage, the churches that "welcomed" Ignatius with honors were not the churches that hosted him (e.g., Philadelphia or Smyrna); they were the churches that traveled to and greeted Ignatius (e.g., Tralles, Magnesia, and Rome). So, their "welcome" refers to their general acceptance and reception of him as a person in their region, despite his criminal indictment. The fact that the churches visited him indicates that they viewed his imprisonment as a representation and embodiment of Christ (Ign. *Eph.* 6.2).[61] Rather than abandoning Ignatius to avoid the risk of shame, the churches in Asia traveled to him. The same happened in Macedonia. The Philippians accompanied Ignatius and other convicted Christians, a public demonstration of both their association with, and high regard for, Christian prisoners (*Phil.* 1.1).

[61] Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch,* 190–91 interprets this event as a "triumphal march," noting that such language was used for the reception of generals as they passed through on triumphal tours. So, people sent representatives to see Ignatius, "a kind of conquering hero." However, a better explanation would be early Christian teaching on receiving and accepting visitors (Mt 10:40–41; Lk 10:16; John 5:24; 12:44–48; 15:23; 2 Cor 7:15). Ignatius is not a triumphal general, but an imitator of Christ, himself a condemned criminal. Ignatius grounds the significance of his own captivity in the reality of Christ's sufferings (*Trall.* 10; *Smyrn*. 4.2). The Christians who visit Ignatius have disregarded the shame of his conviction and related to him by virtue of their common association with Jesus

To inculcate the churches against the potential shame of association, Ignatius uses the positive language of honor when commenting on the meaning of visitors to him, in three other passages. One, when addressing the Ephesians, Ignatius requests that Burrhus remain with him "for your honor and the bishop's" (*Eph.* 2.1). Commissioning a person to travel with the convict was a means of achieving status for the sending community. Ignatius' language was an intentional appeal to honor. Burrhus embodied their collective sacrifice and commitment to Ignatius, for which they accrued honor. Two, from Troas, Ignatius remarks that Burrhus was sent by the churches of Ephesus and Smyrna "for the sake of honor" (εἰς λόγον τιμῆς; *Phld.* 11.2). The phrase indicates that Ignatius himself felt honored through their act of sending Burrhus along with him.[62] Commissioning such a delegate meant the Ephesians esteemed Ignatius enough to care for him as a prisoner and to further assist the dissemination of his letters. The result would be that God would honor them for honoring the prisoner in such a way (cf. *Smyrn.* 10.2). Three, in his conclusion to the Ephesians, Ignatius refers to "to those whom for the honor of God you sent to Smyrna" (*Eph.* 21.1). The honor of God is a regular ethical motive in Ignatius (*Magn.* 3.2; *Trall.* 12.2; *Pol.* 5.2), including for sending delegates to visit churches (cf. *Smyrn.* 11.2). Elsewhere, travel was done "for the glory of God" (*Magn.* 15.1; *Rom.* 10.2). By establishing and strengthening ties with other believers, the senders effect relational unity that glorified God. In these three passages, the sending of delegates to and with Ignatius the prisoner was linked to honor. Yet, in each case, visiting the prisoner produced honor for a different party: the Ephesians, Ignatius, and God. The act of travel to the prisoner an event that united the three parties in a web of mutual honor.

The early Christians' recalculation of honor was a significant aspect of their visit to Ignatius.[63] Despite the adverse social consequences of associating with a criminal, they chose to be physically present with Ignatius due to their reconfigured honor as members of Christ.

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[62] The phrase εἰς λόγον has the sense of "regarding," "on account of," "in the matter of", "for the sake of" (cf. *Smyrn.* 10.1; Phil 4:15, 17). The main question regards the recipient of honor. Who benefits? Do the Ephesians and Smyrnaeans acquire honor for sending Burrhus (cf. *Eph.* 2.1)? Or, does their sending of Burrhus confer honor upon Ignatius? English translations are ambiguous (e.g., Schoedel, "as a token of honor"; Ehmann, "as a pledge of honor"; Holmes, "as a mark of honor"). The following phrase—"The Lord will honor them"—evokes reciprocal honors, as in *Smyrn.* 10.2. That is, God will honor them *since* they have honored Ignatius by sending Burrhus.

[63] For a similar reading of NT instruction regarding incarceration and visitation, see Matthew L. Skinner, "Remember My Chains: New Testament Perspectives on Incarceration," *Interpretation* 72, no. 3 (2018): 269–81.

Travel reveals how the Christians had renounced the world, along with its claims to condemn, shame, and execute its members. Instead, they opted for an alternative reality oriented around Christ. Their physical presence alongside a prisoner exhibited such cruciform convictions. Their movement stimulated not only the exchange of social honors, but also the economy of divine honors. The visit glorified God and, in turn, earned them divine favors.

The churches' travel also embodied an implicit critique of Rome. The community had refused to accept the empire's judgment of Ignatius as a criminal worthy of death. By hailing and greeting Ignatius, they asserted their belief that Ignatius was wrongly and unjustly condemned. The visitation did not set them in direct, public confrontation with Rome, as though Christians desired a new political regime. Rather, Rome's decision on Ignatius was welcomed as a means towards a positive end. The judgments of Rome, however unjust, were swallowed up into a larger frame of reference and made insignificant, a pawn in the larger divine plane. Ironically, Rome's attempt to shame became a means of honor for those associated with Christ.

§7.4 The Motivations for Visiting Ignatius

Why did the churches, especially communities hitherto not connected with Ignatius, travel to visit him? What compelled them to endure the costs and risks of such travel? Ignatius' "mental abnormalities" are often evoked as the driving force behind their movement.[64] Schoedel sensed that Ignatius' profound insecurities mobilized the travel towards him. The bishop was "genuinely uncertain of himself" and his self-esteem depended on others.[65] Such insecurities drove him to elicit and stage the churches' travel, as their arrival created the appearance of church unity and thus legitimated his own martyrdom.[66] Brent similarly

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[64] Psychological explanations have been common among Ignatian interpreters. For example, B. H. Streeter, *The Primitive Church* (London: Macmillan, 1929), 171 presented Ignatius as a man of "abnormal psychology" and "neurotic temper"; Harrison, *Polycarp's Two Epistles*, 97–101, here 100 says the bishop was "self-condemned, covered with shame and self-reproach"; W. H. C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church: A Study of Conflict from the Maccabees to Donatus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 197 suggests that Ignatius was "bordering on mania"; G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, "Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted?," *Past & Present*, no. 26 (1963): 23: "he displays what has often been called a pathological yearning for martyrdom."

[65] Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 45–46.

[66] Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 12.

interprets the church movements as Ignatius' "choreographing of a martyr procession" to compensate for personal failures.[67] Ignatius, controlled by a "highly strung and…disturbed temperament," viewed himself as a sacrificial "scape-goat."[68] So he summoned the churches to enhance the spectacle of his own cult-like martyr procession towards Rome.[69] The church visits would affirm the insecure and deposed bishop. However, the psychological anxieties and personal preferences of a convict hardly explain the mass movement across provinces. As Judith Perkins has argued, we must interpret Ignatius' theology, and the events surrounding his journey, in terms of ideology, not pathology. An interpretation accounting for the broader social context of the churches' travel "seems preferable to a psychological one."[70] Therefore, we explore in this final section how the historical circumstances and theological convictions of early Christians may have animated their movement towards Ignatius the prisoner.

As noted in the first section of this chapter, early Christians developed a tradition of aiding prisoners. Visiting prisoners was a common exhortation in Christian literature, and churches instituted systems to provide such aid. Thus, one factor behind the churches' visit to Ignatius is simply the fact that churches had previously provided such assistance to other prisoners. Visiting prisoners had become a sort of social marker or communal tradition. This does not negate ideological or personal forces behind the movement, but it does identify social patterns propelling their travel. The churches visited Ignatius, in part, just because such behavior had become a customary and regular practice for them.

Ignatius' marginal status as a suffering prisoner seems to have drawn the Christians to him.[71] They traveled to him not just *despite* his status as prisoner, but precisely *because* he was a condemned prisoner. The chains of his conviction made him, in the eyes of the churches,

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[67] Brent, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 47.
[68] Brent, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 19, 45–49.
[69] Brent, "Ignatius of Antioch and the Imperial Cult," 51–58.
[70] Judith Perkins, *The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995), 33.
[71] Maier, *Social Setting*, 158–168 considers Ignatius' "charismatic authority" to explain his "authority relation" with the churches, referring to his ability to issue demands and commands to the churches. The same dynamics explain the churches physical movement toward Ignatius; see also Harry O. Maier, "Seeing the Blood of God. the Triumphant Charade of Ignatius of Antioch the God-Bearer," in *Seeing the God: Image, Space, Performance, and Vision in the Religion of the Roman Empire*, ed. Marlis Arnhold and Harry O. Maier (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr Verlag, 2018), 216–20.

united with both God and their community. The prospect of being a potential martyr conferred a certain prestige to Ignatius. His visible bonds and potential martyrdom lent gravitas, which could shape reality and move people (cf. *Eph.* 2.1–3.1; *Smyrn.* 11.1).[72] Ignatius was aware of the status derived from his sufferings. He describes himself as "judged worthy of serving the glory of God" (*Eph.* 21.1) and "judged worthy to bear a most godly name" (*Magn.* 1.1). Ignatius saw honorable significance in his imprisoned condition.[73] He was in chains "for the sake of the name" (*Eph.* 3.1; cf. 1.2; *Phld.* 5.1; 7.2). The shackles were "the most God-pleasing chains" (*Smyrn.* 11.1), his "spiritual pearls" (*Eph.* 11.2), and even the bonds of Jesus Christ himself (*Phld.* 5.1).[74] The bonds united him with God. Within the Christian imagination, death in the public arena had the effect of converting this condemned criminal into a sacred martyr. In suffering, Ignatius was participating in Christ's passions (*Rom*. 6.3; *Trall.* 11.2) and imitating the martyred apostles (*Eph.* 12.1; Pol. *Phil.* 9.1). The convict was on the brink of reaching God.[75] In the early Christian re-imagination of the self, Ignatius' sufferings and impending death conferred upon him true worth.[76] The fact that Christian communities traveled to Ignatius suggests they shared a similar interpretation of his sufferings. They were drawn to the potential martyr with admiration and praise (cf. *Smyrn.* 5.2). Ignatius' sufferings and esteemed status were linked. As a person who suffered imprisonment and death in a manner resembling Jesus, "Ignatius was seen as an extraordinary embodiment of the group's values."[77] Ignatius made the divine visible, as Christians came to see the vulnerable convict as a sign of Christ. Through travel, the churches could recognized and associated with the sacred persona of Ignatius, a soon-to-be martyr (cf. *Phld.* 7.1).

Ignatius' sufferings created a second dynamic that attracted Christians from various cities. In his conviction, Ignatius shared with the churches their common experience of persecution.

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[72] Maier, *Social Setting*, 161.
[73] Maier, *Social Setting*, 162.
[74] See also, Pol. *Phil.* 1.1. Symbolic interpretations became common in subsequent martyrdom accounts. E.g., *The Martyrs of Lyon* 35; *Mart. Pionus* 2–3; *Mart. Montanus and Lucius* 6.2–4 ("O a happy day for the glory of bonds!…O iron more honorable and precious than the finest gold"); cf. Cyprian, *Ep.* 76.2.
[75] Reaching and obtaining God was Ignatius' favored description of his imminent death (ἐπιτυγχάνω, 20x; τυγχάνω, 5x). See Richard A. Bower, "The Meaning of Ἐπιτνγχάνω in the Epistles of St. Ignatius of Antioch," *VC* 28, no. 1 (1974): 1–14; Mellink, *Death as Eschaton: A Study of Ignatius of Antioch's Desire for Death*, 209–40.
[76] Perkins, *The Suffering Self*, 192.
[77] Maier, *Social Setting*, 168.

They could identify with him as co-members of a marginalized minority group. There is evidence in Ignatius' letter that the churches faced persecution from the rest of society. Ignatius instructed the Ephesians on how to respond to anger, slander, and cruelty from others. He assumed that the Christians were being (or would be) "wronged," "cheated," and "rejected" (*Eph.* 10.2–3).[78] Ignatius was also aware of persecution in Tralles. He exhorted the church to respond charitably to opponents in order to burnish their collective reputation: "Let none of you hold a grudge against his neighbor. Do not give an opportunity to the pagans, lest the godly majority be blasphemed on account of a few foolish people" (*Trall.* 8.2). The church in Magnesia was to "endure all the abuse of the ruler of this age" (*Magn.* 1.2), and the church in Rome seems to have faced hatred from the world (*Rom.* 3.3). For these vulnerable communities facing opposition, Ignatius' conviction reflected their own marginal status. Through common sufferings, the churches could see themselves in Ignatius. Maier rightly notes, "Although to the wider society he was a common criminal, to these communities he would have appeared as an embodiment of separation from the world and an extraordinary example of devotion in the face of hostile opposition."[79] Ignatius' sufferings as a convict and martyr fostered a double-sided appeal that stimulated the churches' movement toward him. Through sufferings, he was united with Christ and united with the Christians in Asia. Christians traveled to visit Ignatius precisely because he was an imprisoned convict.

This manner of accounting for the churches' travel to Ignatius emphasizes the churches' own ideology. For the Christians in Asia, Christ's death and resurrection had become the defining framework for interpreting reality, including their own persecution and suffering.[80] In Ignatius' letter, the symbol of the cross defined the early Christians. He considered believers to be "branches of the cross" (*Trall.* 11.2) and "fruit" from the cross (*Smyrn.* 1.2). For people who already identified with a crucified criminal by name (*Eph.* 11.2; *Magn.* 4.1; 10; *Trall.* 6.1; *Rom.* 3.2–3; *Pol.* 7.3), associating with the prisoner from Syria was hardly abnormal,

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[78] Trebilco, *Early Christians in Ephesus*, 700–01 sees the Ephesian church facing hostility from outsiders, but not a concerted persecution campaign. Regardless of the actual political events behind Ignatius' comment, the Christians of Asia did feel opposed and threatened, which would have shaped their communal identity and dynamics.

[79] Maier, *Social Setting*, 168. In a later era, Cyprian makes this logic explicit; in suffering, Christians stimulate their brothers' minds to ponder divine martyrdom and present themselves as leaders of virtue (*Ep.* 76.2).

[80] Bultmann, "Paul and Ignatius," 275: "[W]hat is peculiar about [Ignatius'] thought is that the whole life of the Christian is drawn into a sacramental unity with Christ and thereby receives a sacramental character—namely, as participation in Christ's passion, death, and resurrection."

even when "Christian" had become a despised label.[81] The churches likely saw Ignatius as an embodiment of the event which defined their own existence, the death of Christ.[82] The churches' own cruciform theology and ideological convictions propelled their voluntary movement toward, and association with, the convict.[83]

§7.5 Conclusions

Ignatius' primary mobile identity while traveling from Antioch to Rome was as a convicted prisoner. Therefore, this chapter has interpreted the churches' travel to him alongside ancient prison visits. Their travel reflects the fictive kinship of early Christians and, according to Ignatius' assessment, the admirable character of the churches and their delegates. Even in the face of notable risks to themselves, the churches visited Ignatius to provide material and emotional support. They chose to publicly associate with Ignatius precisely because of his conviction; suffering granted him respect within the Christian community.

The churches' association with Ignatius via travel highlights early Christian ideology. They were willing to support a condemned and scorned troublemaker, a person of remarkable dishonor. The support was notably broad. The church in Rome advocated for the bishop from Antioch, and churches throughout Asia sent personnel and funds. The measure of support is remarkable considering that, as far as Ignatius' letters indicate, the churches had been previously unconnected with Ignatius. He was not a member of their local community, let alone a relative. So their decision to associate with and celebrate him reflects the strength of both early Christian convictions regarding death and their shared identity across space. Their

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[81] By the time of Ignatius, the term "Christian" seems well-established as a social designation. Cf. 1 Pet 4:16; Pliny, *Ep*. 10.96; Ign., *Eph.* 12.3; *Rom.* 3. For more, see David G. Horrell, "The Label Χριστιανός: 1 Peter 4:16 and the Formation of Christian Identity," *JBL* 126, no. 2 (2007): 361–81; James Corke-Webster, "Trouble in Pontus: The Pliny–Trajan Correspondence on the Christians Reconsidered," *TAPA* 147, no. 2 (2017): 371–411 decenters the persecution of Christians in Pliny's letters with Trajan. This may have some methodological advantages, but does it not negate the fact that Christians were persecuted for being Christians.

[82] Maier, *Social Setting*, 165.

[83] In two articles on travel in Ignatius, Cavan Concannon, building upon the scholarship of Bruno Latour, foregrounds the agency of non-human elements; cf. Concannon, "Assemblages in Ignatius"; Concannon, "'Let Us Know Anything Further Which You Have Heard': Mapping Philippian Connectivity," 201–04. Without neglecting the influence of material factors (e.g., routes, finances, capacity, etc.), a better explanation for the Christians' counterintuitive travel to Ignatius acknowledges the ideological and theological preferences impacting their decision, as discussed here.

theological convictions sustained a network of relational ties and propelled movement across space, even against the strong headwinds of potential shame and execution. The powers of Rome had despised and discarded Ignatius, but the churches' behavior of welcoming and visiting the condemned criminal, motivated by Christ, reckoned him worthy of honor.

Chapter 8. The Churches' Travel to Antioch

As Ignatius traveled to Rome as a prisoner, he connected the churches in Asia and Macedonia with his former church in Syria. In the four letters written from Smyrna, he asked the recipients to pray for the believers in Antioch who faced problems (*Eph*. 21.2; *Magn*. 14; *Trall.* 13.1; *Rom*. 9.1). By the time Ignatius had traveled to Troas, the situation in Antioch had improved and the church was "at peace" (εἰρηνεύω; *Phld.* 10.1; *Smyrn*. 11.2–3; *Pol.* 7.1). This new situation in Antioch lead Ignatius to make a rather onerous request. He asked the churches in Philadelphia and Smyrna to send representatives to Antioch to congratulate and rejoice with them (συγχαίρω; *Phil.* 10; *Smyrn.* 11). Because Ignatius did not have time to write to more churches, he also asked Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna, to spearhead the operation and invite other churches in Asia to likewise send representatives to Antioch (*Pol*. 7–8). Ignatius continued this campaign in Macedonia, getting the church in Philippi to send their support (Pol., *Phil.* 13.1).

Such a journey to Antioch would have incurred significant costs for the churches in Asia. The 2290-kilometer journey from Smyrna to Antioch and back, for example, required 79 days of walking. The churches would have needed to sacrifice time, resources, and personal safety to visit Antioch. Ignatius' request seems audacious.[1] Considering the challenges involved, Water Bauer remarked that this display of support was "unparalleled in the history of the ancient church."[2] The detailed instructions and theological admonitions in Ignatius' request indicate he was keenly aware of the costs of visiting Antioch, yet considered it of utmost importance. Harrison noted the import of Ignatius's request, which to the bishop seemed "a divine command, so clear, so imperious and so compelling as to take precedent of other important matters, and more than justify all the trouble, inconvenience and expense involved in its execution."[3] The idea and execution of distant churches sending representatives to Antioch raises several questions. What was the historical background that prompted Ignatius' request? What language does Ignatius use to explain the churches' travel to Syria? In light of diplomatic protocols between Greek cities, how would the churches have understood the

[1] Streeter, *The Primitive Church*, 181 says that Ignatius made the request "with the self-centeredness of the neurotic temper."
[2] Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy*, 65.
[3] Harrison, *Polycarp's Two Epistles*, 106.

journey? Why was Ignatius so insistent that churches from Asia and even Macedonia visit Syria? What was the meaning the trip, and how did it impact the Christian communities? This chapter addresses these questions about the churches' "unparalleled" travel to Antioch.

§8.1 The Problem and "Peace" in Antioch

Since the 1930s, scholars have proposed various interpretations of the churches' visit to Antioch. According to Streeter, Ignatius' party had managed to vanquish the schismatics behind Ignatius' arrest and appointed his preferred successor as the new bishop in Antioch. So, Ignatius wanted the Asian churches to send representatives to congratulate Antioch on their new bishop.[4] Harrison advanced this hypothesis of internal disunity.[5] The travelers' purpose was to confirm and cement the new unity that the Antiochian Christians had attained. Their presence would achieve several objectives: reassure the Antiochians that they had made the right decision, strengthen the leaders grieved by the discord, shame the opponents for their divisiveness, and squash any group preparing another attack.[6] Schoedel thought that the peace accord between parties in Antioch was still tenuous and so needed reinforcement. Because the situation remained "delicate and required careful negotiations," representatives were sent to "make irrevocable" the newfound agreement in Antioch that vindicated Ignatius as a bishop and martyr.[7] In these views, the churches' visit would support and strengthen Ignatius' group after their recent victory over the schismatics.

In a different reconstruction of the situation, Bauer thought the conflict between Ignatius' "orthodox" group and the opposing "heretics" was still ongoing, and the visitors from Asia would provide an extra boost in the struggle. Ignatius' orthodox party, according to Bauer, was "in danger of being driven back, if not routed from the field, by heresy."[8] So, the bishop made a "frantic effort" to pressure the Asian churches into sending messengers who would defend Ignatius' own legitimacy and help his party regain control.[9] Similarly, Young

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[4] Streeter, *The Primitive Church*, 181.
[5] Harrison, *Polycarp's Two Epistles*, 83–95. Harrison did not agree with Streeter about Ignatius' anxiety over the election of a specific bishop, as a successor is never mentioned (at 82 n.3).
[6] Harrison, *Polycarp's Two Epistles*, 95.
[7] Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 212–13.
[8] Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy*, 65.
[9] Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy*, 64–65.

proposed that Ignatius asked Polycarp to send a council from the Asian churches to elect a replacement bishop in Antioch.[10] In these views, parties within the church were still vying for control, and the visiting representatives would help tip the balance in favor of Ignatius' group.

Whether these advocates see the conflict as already resolved or still ongoing, they all suppose that the background to the churches' subsequent visit was internal discord; the purpose of the churches' travel to Antioch was to promote Ignatius' interests in the internecine conflict; the "peace" in Antioch was harmony within the church, not the cessation of persecution. Because the meaning of the churches' travel to Antioch is a function of the social situation in Antioch,[11] we must first address the cause of Ignatius' conviction and the nature of the newfound "peace." This establishes the historical background for our discussion of the occasion and purpose of the churches' travel to Syria.

The traditional understanding of the social situation in Antioch, as elaborated by Lightfoot, was that Ignatius and the believers faced external persecution.[12] Recent scholarship has reconsidered and largely rejected this view. The new consensus maintains that a bitter fight between Christian parties caused civic discord requiring Roman officials to take action and remove Ignatius.[13] The main problem behind Ignatius' plight, thus, was conflict within the church. Since Harrison developed this position in 1936, it has become a virtual consensus

[10] Robin Darling Young, *In Procession Before the World: Martyrdom As Public Liturgy in Early Christianity* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2001), 20; see also, Fredric W. Schlatter, "The Restoration of Peace in Ignatius' Antioch," *JTS* 35, no. 2 (1984): 465–69.
[11] The interconnection between the issues is evident, for example, in how some authors address them together; e.g., Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 212–14.
[12] Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers, II.1*, 1:1–22.
[13] Some contend that Ignatius voluntarily gave himself up for the sake of peace in the church; e.g., Christine Trevett, "Ignatius 'To the Romans' and I Clement LIV-LVI," *VC* 43, no. 1 (1989): 35–52.

among Ignatian commentators,[14] with few exceptions.[15] This section problematizes the four main arguments[16] for the internal-discord theory then identifies nine problematic issues.

The first argument for the internal conflict theory is linguistic—the verb εἰρηνεύειν, which describes the church in Antioch (*Phld.* 10.1; *Smyrn.* 11.2; *Pol.* 7.1), "regularly means to be at peace with one another" and is not used for relief from persecution.[17] However, while the word εἰρήνη is often the antithesis of internal strife, it can also be connected to the end of persecution and violent opposition in early Christian texts.[18] Peace is a general term, and nothing about it implies only internal conflict. Moreover, Harrison and others never mention what other word Ignatius should have used for speaking about the end of persecution.[19] The term "peace" generally refers to the end of war and conflict,[20] so we would expect Ignatius to use it for the cessation of persecution. Also revealing is the fact that Ignatius does *not* use εἰρην- terms when discussing internal divisions among the churches of Asia Minor. Ignatius' preferred words for internal peace are "unity" (ἕνωσις, 25x) and "harmony" (ὁμόνοια, 8x).

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[14] Streeter, *The Primitive Church*, 175–81; Harrison, *Polycarp's Two Epistles*, 79–106; Corwin, *St. Ignatius*, 80–87; Willard M. Swartley, "The Imitatio Christi in the Ignatian Letters," *VC* 27, no. 2 (1973): 81–103; C. P. Hammond Bammel, "Ignatian Problems," *JTS* 33, no. 1 (1982): 62–97; Schlatter, "The Restoration of Peace in Ignatius' Antioch"; Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 11–13, 212–215; Trevett, "Ignatius 'To the Romans'"; Christine Trevett, *A Study of Ignatius of Antioch in Syria and Asia* (Queenston; Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), 60–66; John-Paul Lotz, *Ignatius and Concord: The Background and Use of the Language of Concord in the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 177–85; Maier, *Social Setting*, 147, 168 was agnostic about Ignatius' situation in Antioch since the limited evidence makes any opinion "highly untenable"; but he later affirmed Schoedel's faction thesis in his "The Politics and Rhetoric of Discord and Concord in Paul and Ignatius," in *Trajectories through the New Testament and the Apostolic Fathers*, ed. Andrew Gregory and Christopher Tuckett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 316.

[15] I have encountered only one modern dissenter to the internal-discord hypothesis: Thomas A. Robinson, *Ignatius of Antioch and the Parting of the Ways: Early Jewish-Christian Relations* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009), 163–202 offers an extended critique of the prevailing consensus; he favors the view of external persecution, but acknowledges the situation remains unexplained and ultimately unknowable.

[16] Advocates of the internal-discord theory make their case largely from arguments that Harrison established. My four points correspond with Harrison's points 1–2 (pp. 83–90), 3 (90–91), 6 (95–102), and 4–5 (91–95). Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 213 concisely summarized the arguments in five points. Here, I have merged his points (c) and (d).

[17] Harrison, *Polycarp's Two Epistles*, 83.

[18] Lk 14:32; 19:42; John 16:33; Acts 9:31; 12:20; Rev 6:4; cf., Josephus, *Life* 211; *Ant.* 11.214; Plb., *Hist*. 5.8.7, and esp. 1 Macc 18:3–4.

[19] Robinson, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 169.

[20] W. Foerster, "Εἰρήνη," in *TDNT*, ed. Gerhard Kittel et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), II. 406–20.

He notably does not use those terms for the situation in Antioch, suggesting the problem there was not an internal conflict.[21]

A second argument is historical—there is no evidence for general opposition against Christians in Antioch.[22] Although we possess no Decian-like imperial decree against Christians or explicit comment from Ignatius about persecution in Antioch (which we would hardly expect anyhow), there does exist broad circumstantial evidence of persecution against Christians in Antioch. There are signs of general persecution of Christians in the time of Trajan. Pliny's correspondence with Trajan indicates the emperor permitted Christians to be condemned for their religious "impiety."[23] Ignatius' letters suggest his martyrdom was not a solitary incident—the Ephesians were a "highway" of those killed for God (*Eph.* 12.2) and other convicted Christians joined Ignatius from Philippi (Pol., *Phil.* 9.1). These statements suggest wider government action against Christians. We might also discern persecution against Christians specifically in Antioch. Josephus notes that Jews in Antioch faced frequent hostility,[24] suggesting a general animosity towards the religious minority with which early Christians were likely affiliated. The Gospel of Matthew, which is often associated with Antioch,[25] has many teachings about persecution (Matt 5:11–12; 10:16–23, 28–39; 16:24–25; 24:9–13), which suggests Christians there came to expect opposition. Acts also reports that it was in Antioch where the disciples were first called "Christians" (Acts 11.26), a term that

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[21] Harrison, *Polycarp's Two Epistles,* 84–90 reads other terms as also pointing to internal dissension, but their meaning is too uncertain to make a compelling case. For example, Ignatius says about the church in Antioch, "they are at peace and have obtained their own greatness (μέγεθος) and their own corporate body (σωματεῖον) has been restored to them" (*Smyrn.* 11.2, trans. mine). Ignatius elsewhere links the term μέγεθος with external opposition ("Christianity is greatest [μεγέθους] when it is hated by the world," *Rom.* 3.3), and the word σωματεῖον, though rare and multivalent, seems to mean "corporate body" here (cf. LSJ s.v. σωματεῖον; Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, II.1.319 n.8). Therefore, I propose that *Smyrn.* 11.2 means the Christians in Antioch have attained stature by enduring persecution, and the scattered community has regained the ability to congregate together after a period of not meeting jointly because of the opposition. So, the claims of Harrison and Schoedel that the words must signal corporate unity are unconvincing.

[22] Harrison, *Polycarp's Two Epistles*, 90; Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 213; Trevett, "Ignatius 'To the Romans,'" 35.

[23] Pliny, *Ep.* 10.96–97. Christians maintained a tradition about Trajan's persecution, both in general and in Antioch; cf. *Orig. Hom. Luc.* 6.4; Eus., *EH* 3.32–33; *Ant. Act. Ign.* 1–2*; Rom. Act. Ign.* 2; John Nikiu, *Chron.* 7.1–12.

[24] *Ant*. 14.5; 19.287–291; *J.W.* 7.47–53; 7.100–103. For discussion, see Robinson, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 128–39; Andrea U. de Giorgi and A. Asa Eger, *Antioch: A History* (London; New York: Routledge, 2021), 80, 94–98.

[25] David E. Garland, *Reading Matthew: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2012), 3.

likely originated as a hostile designation among Roman administrators.[26] Luke's remark, thus, indicates that the Christians in Antioch faced hostility and punishment. The most obvious evidence of persecution in Antioch is Ignatius' own arrest and conviction. The bishop of Antioch claims he was condemned to death "for the Name" (*Eph.* 1.2; 3.1; *Magn.* 1.2; *Smyrn.* 4.2). Among early Christians, this phrase expressed the reason behind their sufferings.[27] Ignatius repeats that his chains were "for the sake of Christ."[28] Ignatius' language indicates that he faced hostility in Antioch for his identity as a Christian. Robinson makes the insightful point that Ignatius' comments about martyrdom seem like seasoned reflections, not random musings developed overnight.[29] This reflects a situation in which Ignatius had faced prior external opposition and perhaps even developed a pastoral response for the community in Antioch. On the balance of evidence, Ignatius and Christians in Antioch appear to have faced external hostilities.[30]

The third argument is theological—Ignatius' attitude concerning his own unworthiness, which resulted from the disunity in Antioch, changed after he heard the positive news from Antioch.[31] Ignatius made self-deprecating comments because he failed to maintain unity in his episcopal duties, then felt approved once the church obtained peace.[32] However, Ignatius' sense of worthiness does not seem to change between his letters from Smyrna and then Troas.

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[26] Horrell, "The Label Χριστιανός."
[27] Acts 5:41; 9:16; 1 Pet 4:14–16; Pliny, *Ep.* 10.96.2. Two generations after Ignatius, Tertullian opens his *Apology* by decrying how Christians are convicted just because of "the name" (Chs. 2–3).
[28] *Eph*. 1.2; 3.1; 11.2; *Magn.* 1.2; *Trall*. 10; 12.1; *Rom.* 1.1; *Phld*. 5.1; 7.2.
[29] Robinson, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 153–54. For Ignatius' thought regarding martyrdom and death, see Mellink, *Death as Eschaton: A Study of Ignatius of Antioch's Desire for Death*.
[30] This argument, in fact, cuts the other way—there is no evidence of church divisions in Antioch, as Harrison plainly concedes (p. 96). Many assume that Ignatius' letters written in Asia actually reflect his negative experiences from Antioch, such as disunity and insubordination. So they mirror-read such tensions back into the Syrian community. For example, Corwin, *St. Ignatius*, 29, 52–65 argues from clues in Ignatius' letters that in Antioch there was an Essene Jewish Christian group who revered the Teacher of Righteousness and a Docetic Christian group who had separated themselves. For other instances of this approach, see; Harrison, *Polycarp's Two Epistles*, 89; Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 11; Trevett, *A Study of Ignatius*, 52; Raymond E. Brown and John P. Meier, *Antioch and Rome: New Testament Cradles of Catholic Christianity* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), 73–81. However, the conclusions inferred from such mirror reading are strained and unconvincing. For problems, see Robinson, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 118; Isacson, *To Each Their Own Letter*.
[31] Swartley, "Imitatio Christi" made this case based on a detailed linguistic analysis; for a rebuttal, see Robinson, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 171–81.
[32] Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 213 states that Ignatius' self-deprecation "points to the tension between Ignatius and the church of Antioch which he was seeking to resolve."

Contra the claim, Ignatius felt worthy well *before* the peace (*Eph.* 2.2; 9:1; 21.2; *Magn.* 1.1; 2:1; *Trall.* inscr.; *Rom.* 2.2) and spoke of being unworthy even *after* the peace (*Smyrn.* 11.1; cf. *Phld.* 5.1).[33] Ignatius' self-importance was not derived from the communal situation in Antioch. Rather, the origin of Ignatius' self-deprecating comments and sense of unworthiness was his status as a bishop-martyr. Ignatius acknowledged to the Romans, "I myself am ashamed to be counted among [the Syrians], for I am not worthy, since I am the very last of them and an untimely birth" (*Rom.* 9.2). The language here echoes Paul's autobiographical remarks in 1 Cor 15:8–9,[34] which refers to Paul's life before his calling, not during his ministry. Ignatius apparently felt that he did not deserve to become their bishop because of some prior issue.[35] Moreover, once he was condemned, Ignatius regarded himself personally unworthy of the status of being a Christian prisoner and future martyr for Christ.[36] The effacement comes not from his guilt over ministry failures, but from the dissonance between his humble self-identity and his new public persona as a martyr. He felt such a heroic martyr status was incongruent with the self that he knew. After his conviction, Ignatius often links his "worthiness" to his future martyrdom, not to past failures. He was anxious about the possibility of *not* dying and failing to become a disciple through death (*Eph.* 2.1; 3:2; *Rom.* 1.2–5:3).[37] The convicted Christian would be found worthy precisely if and when he died as a martyr (*Rom.* 1.1; 2.2), not if the Syrian believers reconciled. In sum, Ignatius' own sense of worthiness did not change after the "peace" because it was predicated upon him faithfully enduring persecution, not church unity in Antioch.

The fourth argument is an inference—the strong response from Ignatius must have been occasioned by "something far more momentous, and of far deeper significance" than just relief from persecution.[38] Ignatius' concern about dispatching representatives "seems unusually strong if it is simply a matter of congratulating the church after persecution."[39] From this assumption, Harrison and Schoedel infer that Ignatius must have been desperate to

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[33] Harrison, *Polycarp's Two Epistles*, 102 notes this curious absence of any change in Ignatius' attitude, but attributes it to Ignatius' mental problems. The macabre bishop was "less sane than most."
[34] Of all the Pauline letters, Ignatius most regularly quotes or echoes 1 Corinthians; cf. Ign. *Eph.* 16.1; 18.1; *Rom.* 5.1; 9.2; *Phld.* 3.3.
[35] We can only speculate about details, as we know nothing about Ignatius' life prior to his arrest; cf. Robinson, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 1–3.
[36] Maier, *Social Setting*, 169.
[37] Robinson, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 180–81.
[38] Harrison, *Polycarp's Two Epistles*, 94; Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy*, 65.
[39] Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 213.

justify his position and regain authority. However, the purpose of other long-distance travel events between Christian communities was to provide reprieve to fellow believers suffering distress. Examples include helping the poor in Jerusalem (Acts 11:28; Rom 15:26; 2 Cor 9:2–4) or visiting the imprisoned (cf. §7.1). Despite the assumptions of modern scholars, building and demonstrating solidarity with fellow believers across the Mediterranean could have justified such great efforts. Personal insecurity and power-grabbing were not the only factors propelling movement among early Christians.

These four arguments connecting Ignatius' plight to church disunity in Antioch prove to be flawed and untenable. At each point, in fact, the evidence suggests that external persecution prompted Ignatius' troubles. Ignatius language of "peace" suggest the cessation of violent opposition; historical circumstances point toward opposition against Christians during Trajan's reign and in Antioch; Ignatius' preoccupation with being "found worthy" reflects a desire to endure persecution; and Christians often traveled to assist fellow believers who were in distress.

In addition to the weaknesses of its claims, the internal-discord theory struggles to explain many aspects of the situation in Antioch and Asia Minor.[40] We present these issues as a series of nine conditional statements. One, if the problem in Antioch was internal dissension, we struggle to explain what led the Roman authorities to get involved and convict Ignatius of a capital offense.[41] Did a physical fight break out between Christians? Did fellow Christians accuse Ignatius before Roman authorities? Such reasons for Ignatius' arrest are unstated and unlikely. Two, if Ignatius himself hatched the idea of sending church representatives in order to vindicate himself, the neighboring churches would not have visited Antioch first (cf. *Phld.* 10.2). The idea of visiting Antioch was not Ignatius' own machination to gain his control or legitimacy, but originated with the churches near Antioch. Three, if Ignatius wanted to influence the situation in Antioch in his favor, he should have sent people *before* the peace, *while* conflict yet persisted. However, while the tensions remained, he only asked the churches to pray for the Syrian believers (*Eph*. 21.2; *Magn*. 14; *Trall*. 13.1; *Rom.* 9.1). Sending the envoys after the conflict indicates that Ignatius did not expect them to actively resolve the problem in Antioch, but celebrate its resolution. Four, if Ignatius was anxious

[40] My argument in this paragraph draws from Robinson, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 182–201.
[41] Robinson, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 189–90.

about the internal politics and wanted to add weight to his side, he would have asked ranking bishops and presbyters to travel. However, he only asks the churches to send representatives and allows them to decide who would visit Antioch (*Phld.* 10.1; *Smyrn.* 11.2; *Pol.* 7.2). Five, if Ignatius faced internal tensions and the opposing party "won" by virtue of his exit from the city, then "peace" would not have been so quickly established. The heretical "winners" would have likely consolidated their power, not compromised.[42] Six, if Ignatius was a failed and dismissed cleric, the Asian churches would not have conferred such honors upon him. The scope of Ignatius' influence upon distant churches suggests he was not a failed leader. Ignatius claims he was still a bishop, and people travel and relate to him as a legitimate leader and persecuted martyr. Seven, if Ignatius was concerned primarily about internal harmony in Antioch (even to the point of handing himself over as a peace offering), it seems inconsistent for him to encourage the bishops in Asia to strongly oppose schismatics (*Phld.* 7.1–2; *Smyrn.* 5; *Magn.* 3.2–4.1). For Ignatius, church unity was not about two parties reconciling, but about the opponents coming under the bishop. Eight, if Ignatius had faced opponents in Antioch, he could have mentioned those experiences for rhetorical gain in his letters to the Asian churches. For example, he could have compared the Magnesian schismatics to those he faced in Antioch, or referenced his battle with opponents to encourage Polycarp and the Smyrnaeans in their struggles. However, Ignatius does not mention any opponents from Antioch. Nine, if Ignatius wanted the representatives to address internal issues during their visits, he would have instructed them about combatting opponents, restoring the bishop's authority, and establishing unity in Antioch. Ignatius broached such concerns throughout the body of his letters when dealing with the communities in Asia, but never in the concluding instructions regarding their visit to Antioch. Overall, the internal-discord reconstruction creates many inconsistencies. Solutions might be presented for individual points, but a reconstruction that attempts to explain everything would be conjectural and not compelling.

The theory that internal discord lies behind Ignatius' conviction rests upon shaky arguments and does not accord with many aspects of the situation. The simplest and most plausible explanation for Ignatius' plight remains the one that Ignatius himself provided—he was in chains for the sake of Christ, condemned to death for "the name." The primary cause of

[42] Harrison, *Polycarp's Two Epistles*, 103; Corwin, *St. Ignatius*, 54; Brent, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 53–54 speculates that the opposing party felt convicted and repented for causing Ignatius such trouble.

Ignatius' conviction and execution appears to have been external opposition.[43] Thus, the Asian churches would visit the collective church in Antioch, not an internal faction. Their journey should be interpreted in light of relational links between Christian communities across regions, not political jockeying or Ignatius' personal desires for vindication.

Based upon conclusions about internal discord being the cause of Ignatius' conviction, recent scholarship has interpreted the churches' visit to Antioch within the context of church conflict and Ignatius' plight. As a result, the meaning of Ignatius' audacious request of the Asian churches to visit Antioch has been overshadowed by questions regarding the historical background of Ignatius' problems in Antioch.[44] To understand the churches' visit to Antioch, we analyze the language of Ignatius' request in his three letters from Troas (*Phld.* 10:1–2; *Smyrn.* 11.1–3; *Pol.* 7.1–8.1).[45]

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[43] We cannot isolate the specific political situation behind the persecution, though one circumstance does lend itself to being rather plausible. The emperor Trajan, under whom Ignatius was condemned, was regularly based in Antioch of Syria after 111 to lead an eastern campaign against the Parthians. Dio Cassius recounts an earthquake that devasted Antioch in the winter of 115 (*Rom. Hist.*, 68.24–25). Multitudes died and the emperor took shelter outdoors in the hippodrome. Such an unpropitious calamity would have destabilized Trajan's political authority and required some sacrifice for appeasement. As people who did not express piety to the Roman gods or venerate the emperors, Christians were often the scapegoats for major disasters (Pliny, *Ep.* 10.96–97; Tert., *Apol.* 40.2; Cyprian, *Ep.* 75; Jews faced similar recriminations in Josephus, *J.W.* 7.37–62). Also, rather than punishing the entire group, Romans generally targeted community leaders (cf. Heidi Wendt, "'Ea Superstitione': Christian Martyrdom and the Religion of Freelance Experts," JRS 105 [2015]: 183–202). In this context, Ignatius was condemned and transported to death in Rome (cf. Heb 11:37; 2 Tim 4:17; *Hermas 10.1*; *Mart. Pol.* 3–4; also, Cicero, *Against Piso*, 36; *Digest* 48.19.31). With only circumstantial details, suggestions about the timing and circumstances of persecution in Antioch at the time of Ignatius remain conjectural. For reviews of various proposals regarding the date, see Trevett, *A Study of Ignatius*, 3–8; Lookadoo, "Date and Authenticity of Ignatian Letters," 94–99. For further support of the situation outlined here, see Decrept, "Circonstances et Interprétations Du Voyage d'Ignace d'Antioche."

[44] To my knowledge, the most substantial analysis of the churches' travel to Antioch is Zahn, *Ignatius von Antiochien*, 285–87.

[45] The three passages have a common four-part structure and similar language. The first section recounts the occasion for the request—the churches' prayers have helped bring peace to the church in Antioch. The second section contains Ignatius' main request for the churches to appoint a representative. Section three explains the two-fold purpose for the churches' journey—to congratulate Antioch and to glorify God. The final section, which is the lengthiest and most diverse of the three letters, provides reasons why the churches should comply; Ignatius here presents his request as a divine task that God would enable and receive glory through. (Parenthetical comments in *Smyrn.* 11.1 and *Pol.* 7.1 offer autobiographical reflections about Ignatius' own suffering and response, but seem tangential to his request.) The overall length and rhetorical maneuvers of these passages indicate that the request was important to Ignatius.

§8.2 The Ambassadorial Nature of the Churches' Visit

Communities in the Greco-Roman world would often send ambassadors to another city to represent their interests in that location. In 38 CE, the Jewish community in Alexandria faced civic strife with their Gentile neighbors. To address the issue, they sent one of their leaders, named Philo, to lead a diplomatic mission to Gaius in Rome. After a long journey to Rome, he waited to present his case to the emperor, hoping to secure the emperor's favor on behalf of the Alexandrian Jews.[46] This was a common diplomatic procedure whenever an ancient community desired help from, or better relations with, a distant party. A community would appoint an "ambassador" to conduct an "embassy" to other civic leaders in order to complete a specific, designated task.[47] The ambassador(s) would then travel to another place, seek diplomatic access, present the request, and then journey back home to convey the decision to the relevant parties.[48] Because political leaders in the Greco-Roman world preferred to communicate in person instead of through written message, relations between civic groups in the Roman era were often mediated through diplomatic missions.[49] These diplomatic exchanges occurred *ad hoc* as specific issues arose (not through established political institutions such as a department of foreign affairs).[50] So any entity—a city, association, family, etc.—could send an embassy. Undertaking an embassy was physically dangerous, financially expensive, and politically risky.[51] Therefore, communities often recognized and thanked (successful) ambassadors with public honors, such as an inscription.

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[46] Philo, *Embassy to Gaius* recounts the event.

[47] For ancient diplomacy and embassies, see R. Regnat, "Legatio," in *Dictionnaire des antiquites grecques et romaines*, ed. C. Daremberg and E. Saglio, vol. 3 (Paris: Libraire Hachette, 1906), 1025–38; Derek J. Mosley, *Envoys and Diplomacy in Ancient Greece* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1973); Millar, *Emperor in the Roman World*, 363–463; D. Kienast, "Presbeia," *PWSup* 13 (1973): 499–628; James H. Oliver, *Greek Constitutions Of Early Roman Emperors* (Philadelphia, PA: American Philosophical Society, 1989), 1–10, passim; Bash, *Ambassadors for Christ*, 1–80; Claude Eilers, ed., *Diplomats and Diplomacy in the Roman World* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2009).

[48] About the diplomatic process, especially procedures for securing an audience in Rome and then publicizing the outcome, see Jean-Louis Ferrary, "After the Embassy to Rome: Publication and Implementation," in *Diplomats and Diplomacy in the Roman World*, ed. Claude Eilers (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2009), 127–42.

[49] Francesca Gazzano, "Greek Ambassadors and the Rhetoric of Supplication," *KTÈMA* 44 (2019): 57.

[50] Claude Eilers, "Introduction," in *Diplomats and Diplomacy in the Roman World*, ed. Claude Eilers (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2009), 1–14.

[51] Mandates compelling people to serve as ambassadors suggest a general reluctance (cf., *Lex Irnitana*, Ch. G; Just., *Dig.* L.VII.4.5). Ambassadors were assigned a stipend for their expenses (cf., *Lex Irnitana*, Ch.

The epigraphic evidence would suggest that embassies during the Imperial Period were primarily to the Roman Emperor or senate. While such diplomatic missions to Rome were crucial components of cities' wellbeing throughout the empire,[52] embassies to provincial officials and other cities were, in fact, much more numerous.[53] Delegations sent between cities were a regular and vital aspect of diplomacy for Greek cities. They had a long tradition of sending representative envoys to other cities to participate in those cities' theatrical performances, religious festivals, and athletic games.[54] These diplomatic interactions cultivated the civic connections that ensured a city's security and prestige.

Diplomatic missions were a routine aspect of Hellenistic civic life, and abundant public inscriptions recognize ambassadors. So ordinary people in the Greek East, including early Christians such as Ignatius and his audiences, would have been familiar with the protocols and language of ancient diplomacies.[55] Ignatius' three passages about the churches' visit to Antioch deliberately echo the terms and concepts of such diplomatic exchanges, as though he was commissioning the churches on a (quasi-) ambassadorial mission to promote harmony between the churches. This proposal is not novel. Prior commentators have noted the ambassadorial language in Ignatius' request, but mostly in passing comments with limited support.[56] This section develops and advances this interpretation through a close analysis of

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G; Just., *Dig.* L.VII.2), though many are recognized for paying their own expenses (for examples, see Bash, *Ambassadors for Christ,* 62–63).

[52] Millar, *Emperor in the Roman World* demonstrates that a primary role of the Roman Emperor was handling petitions and requestions initiated by others. "The sheer volume of evidence for embassies from the provincial communities to the emperor must make us realize that we are dealing with an essential aspect of the life of empire" (385).

[53] Werner Eck, "Diplomacy as Part of the Administrative Process in The Roman Empire," in *Diplomats and Diplomacy in the Roman World*, ed. Claude Eilers (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2009), 196–207. Embassies to neighboring cities are not as well attested because inscriptions tended to record extraordinary and successful missions that brought notable prestige to the community.

[54] David Magie, *Roman Rule in Asia Minor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), 102–03; Simon R. F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 127–28; Christian Marek, *In the Land of a Thousand Gods: A History of Asia Minor in the Ancient World*, trans. Steven Rendall (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 498–508.

[55] Bash, *Ambassadors for Christ*, 15, 24; Eck, "Diplomacy as Administrative Process," 206.

[56] Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 213: "Ignatius uses the language of ancient intercivic diplomacy—χειροτονῆσαι, πρεσβεῦσαι πρεσβείαν—to make his request"; Bash, *Ambassadors for Christ*, 164 notes the

Ignatius' language. We examine four word groups—i.e., ambassador/ embassy (πρεσβ–), to appoint (χειροτονῆσαι), to congratulate (συγχαρῆναι), and glory/worth (δοξα-/αξιο-)—and the ambassadorial method of collective representation.

1. Ambassador and Embassy. The clearest indication that Ignatius frames the churches' travel to Antioch as a diplomatic embassy is his use of the πρεσβ– word group. He instructs the Philadelphians "to appoint a deacon to go there on a diplomatic mission as God's ambassador" (χειροτονῆσαι διάκονον εἰς τὸ πρεσβεῦσαι ἐκεῖ θεοῦ πρεσβείαν; *Phld.* 10.1). The church in Smyrna, likewise, is to appoint a "godly ambassador" (θεοπρεσβεύτην; *Smyrn*. 11.2).[57] The letter to Polycarp does not contain πρεσβ–, but instead calls the potential envoy a "God-runner" (θεοδρόμος; 7.2), an apparent substitute for θεοπρεσβεύτης.

The nouns πρεσβεία and πρεσβευτής, each used by Ignatius, commonly referred to a diplomatic representative sent from a community on a specific mission, i.e., an "ambassador" or "envoy."[58] For example, an Augustan letter to Sardis states, "Your ambassadors (πρέσβεις) had audience of me in Rome and presented the decree sent by you."[59] The related verb, πρεσβεύω, means to function as an ambassador or representative.[60] Ignatius uses this verb in the εἰς clause to clarify the reason why the Philadelphians should appoint a deacon to Antioch; he was "to go on an embassy." Polycarp echoes Ignatius' diplomatic language. Having received a letter from the Philippians to forward to Antioch, Polycarp reassures them that the task will be completed by "either myself or someone whom I will send as an ambassador on our behalves" (εἴτε ἐγώ, εἴτε ὃν πέμπω πρεσβεύσοντα καὶ περὶ ὑμῶν; Pol.,

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ambassadorial functions in Ignatius' travel request in the final paragraph; Brent, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 50–53, 68–70 further explores the churches' travel with some discussion of embassies; however, his comments build upon an implausible premise (i.e., the church delegates were akin to imperial couriers traversing the *cursus publicus*) and reach an unlikely conclusion (i.e., their journey was part of a choreographic religious procession recognizing Ignatius as a scapegoat sacrifice); cf. also his "Ignatius and Polycarp: The Transformation of the New Testament Traditions in the Content of Mystery Cults," in *Trajectories through the New Testament and the Apostolic Fathers*, ed. Andrew Gregory and Christopher Tuckett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 340–42.

[57] Schoedel and Holmes render the neologism "godly ambassador." Lightfoot and Ehrman opt for "ambassador of God."

[58] Kienast, "Presbeia"; Harry C. Avery, "The Meaning of Πρεσβευεσθαι," *ClQ* 40, no. 2 (1990): 545–46; Bash, *Ambassadors for Christ*, 4–5. Related, the term πρεσβεῖα refers to the people (and event of) being commissioned to travel to another location on behalf of a group, i.e., "embassy" or "mission".

[59] *Sardis* VII.1, inscription #8, l 23.

[60] LSJ, s.v.; CGL, s.v.

Phil. 13.1, trans. mine). Ignatius described the travel event to Antioch as a type of diplomatic embassy in his letters, and that language was received and perpetuated by Polycarp.

Διάκονος is a closely associated term that confirms the diplomatic nature of the journey. Collins' monograph on διακονία concluded that the term, rather than referring to "service" or an ecclesiastical office, meant "emissary" or "messenger."[61] Although διάκονοι were not part of the terminology of official diplomacy, they were representative messengers and emissaries between communities.[62] In *Phil*. 10.1–2, Ignatius recommends that the person sent from Philadelphia should be a διάκονος who was worthy of undertaking such διακονία. According to Collins, "The latter term means 'mission' and the former term designates the person who carries it out as emissary of the community."[63] In Ignatius' instructions, διάκονος designated the "godly ambassador" who traveled from the church on an embassy.[64]

2. To Appoint. Ignatius makes the same appeal in all three letters from Troas—the churches should "appoint" ambassadors who would travel to Antioch (χειροτονῆσαι; *Phld.* 10.1; *Smyrn* 11.1; *Pol*. 7.2). Rather than an imperative verb, he makes the request periphrastically. Because of the new peace in Antioch it was now "appropriate to appoint" (πρέπει χειροτονῆσαι) certain people from the church to travel to Syria.

The verb χειροτονῆσαι was a technical term for the process of selecting envoys by raising one's hand to vote in an assembly.[65] A constitutive element of any embassy was the community designating certain people to perform the diplomatic duties. The sending community formally elected the ambassadors. Thus, the words "appoint" and "ambassador" were often collocated. For example, Tiberius reportedly delayed hearing ambassadors lest even more ambassadors get appointed (ἕτεροι πρέσβεις ἐπιχειροτονηθέντες) to visit him.[66]

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[61] John N. Collins, *Diakonia: Re-Interpreting the Ancient Sources* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).
[62] Collins, *Diakonia*, 170–71.
[63] Collins, *Diakonia*, 225.
[64] For similar usage of the *diakonia* for other traveling emissaries in Ignatius, cf. *Smyrn* 10.1; 12.1.
[65] LSJ, s.v.; CGL, s.v. Markos Siotis, "Die klassische und die christliche Cheirotonie in ihrem Verhältnis (Ε΄)," *ΘΕΟΛΟΓΟΣ* 21, no. 2 (1950): 249–51; Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 213; Bash, *Ambassadors for Christ*, 4–5.
[66]Josephus, *Ant.* 18.171; cf., *J.W.* 4.256; for examples from the classical and Hellenistic eras, see Demosthenes, *On the Halonnesus,* 7.19; Aristotle, *Athenian Constitution,* 43.6; Lysias, *Against Agoratus*

Civic ambassadors were, almost by definition, people "appointed" by a community to travel for a defined task.

The appointment of a traveling representative appears to have been common within early Christian communities. From an early period, Pauline congregations had a process to designate certain people to travel and visit other churches as their representative. Paul tells the Corinthians, almost in passing, that churches in Macedonia had appointed someone to visit them and then accompany Paul while collecting funds for Jerusalem (χειροτονηθεὶς ὑπὸ τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν; 2 Cor 8:19). This unnamed person, who was well known for his ministry of proclamation, was appointed to travel as a representative among the churches of Greece.[67] Although in Late Antiquity the term came to mean "ordination" of clergy by the laying-on of hands,[68] during the NT era it meant to elect or appoint someone for a task.[69] Ignatius seemingly alludes to such a practice among the Asian churches in his time.

3. To Congratulate. The purpose of the appointed ambassadors was "to congratulate" the churches in Antioch (εἰς τὸ συγχαρῆναι αὐτοῖς; συγχαρῆναι αὐτοῖς; *Phld* 10.1b; *Smyrn.* 11.2). Despite the overall length of Ignatius' instructions to the churches about visiting Antioch, he only elliptically mentions the actual purpose of the potential journey as though the verb's meaning was self-explanatory.

The term συγχαρῆναι generically meant to "rejoice together" or "offer congratulations"[70] and was often used in the context of embassies. Extending congratulations upon a momentous occasion, such as the beginning of a new regime, was a common ambassadorial task.[71]

10.3; C. Bradford Welles, *Royal Correspondence in the Hellenistic Period* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1934), 222 (no. 53 I C l. 16).

[67] Hans Dieter Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9: A Commentary on Two Administrative Letters of the Apostle Paul* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 74–75; John M. G. Barclay, "The Letters of Paul and the Construction of Early Christian Networks," in *Letters and Communities: Studies in the Socio-Political Dimensions of Ancient Epistolography*, ed. Paola Ceccarelli et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 289–301.

[68] Cuthbert Turner, "Χειροτονία, Χειροθεσία, Ἐπίθεσις Χειρῶν," *JTS* 24 (1923): 496–504 traces Christian usage during the 3–4 CC.

[69] G. H. R Horsley, *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity*, vol. 1 (Australia: Macquarie University, 1981), 123.

[70] CGL, s.v.

[71] Eck, "Diplomacy as Administrative Process," 195; Diodorus Siculus, *History* 17.113.3 recounts five types of embassies to Alexander, of which one was to bring gifts and congratulations; throughout the

Histories about Alexander recount how the triumphant king held court to welcome envoys from many peoples. They came bearing crowns and gifts for the purpose of "congratulating (συγχαίροντες) Alexander on his victories" (Diod. Sic., *History* 17.113.1). Arrian mentions specific instances. The Athenians sent a ten-person envoy to offer Alexander "their formal (if belated) congratulations" (*Anabasis* 1.10.3); North Africans and Italians likewise met Alexander, "congratulating him and presenting him with a crown as king of Asia" (7.15.4–5). When Arrian's sources did not record the specific purpose of envoys to Alexander, the biographer inserts, "I imagine most of them came to offer him crowns and congratulate him on his victories" (7.19.1). The comment, by this Greek historian contemporary with Ignatius, suggests that congratulations could be an assumed purpose for envoys.

The congratulatory purpose of envoys continued in the Imperial era. Titus boasted how nations had sent embassies who congratulated his family upon their political ascension (Josephus, *J.W.* 6.342). Inscriptions broadly attest to this practice. For example, a bronze table from Assos recorded a civic decree to congratulate Caligula upon his ascension (37 CE).[72] Dio Chrysostom similarly mentions the Apameans' "mission of congratulation" (τῆς πρεσβείας ἣν ἐπέμψατε εὐχαριστοῦντες; *Or.* 40.13) to Trajan upon his ascension in 98 CE. The Asian churches' travel to congratulate the Antiochian church imitated the civic practice of embassies to "congratulate" their hosts.

4. Glory and Worth. An embassy was not a back-office, bureaucratic task. Every part of the ambassadorial event—i.e., appointment, departure, appeal, implementation, and recognition—was a public matter. Embassies had audiences. The public event carried social meaning and expressed the status of each participant. Glory, honor, and worth were thus commonplace elements of ancient embassies. Ignatius' request of the churches appeals to these social values. For example, *Pol.* 7.2 notes how multiple parties would all gain esteem from the ambassadorial travel event: "appoint somehow whom you consider to be especially dear … so that he may glorify your resolute love, to the glory of God" (τοῦτον καταξιῶσαι,

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sources, envoys' other main purpose was to present their community's request for assistance through an appeal, as analyzed in Bash, *Ambassadors for Christ*, 48–51.

[72] *IAssos* 26; see also *IGR IV* 1060 (about a mid-first century envoy from Cos to congratulate Tiberius); *Sardis* VII.1, inscription #8, ll 16, 25; *IGR* iv. 1693; the dossier of Seleucus of Rhosus (cf. Andrea Raggi, "The Epigraphic Dossier of Seleucus of Rhosus: A Revised Edition," *Zeitschrift Für Papyrologie Und Epigraphik* 147 [2004]: 123–38).

ἵνα πορευθεὶς εἰς Συρίαν δοξάσῃ ὑμῶν τὴν ἄοκνον εἰς δόξαν θεοῦ). In Ignatius' requests, four entities would receive enhanced status through an embassy to Antioch: the ambassador, the sending community, God, and the hosts. We examine each in turn.

Ambassadors enjoyed significant honor. Communities would appoint, as ambassadors, people of notable honor who were then honored upon completing the embassy. During the Imperial period, when the *pax Romana* had removed combat as a means of achieving fame for young men, embassies remained an opportune pathway for people to advance their public standing, according to Plutarch (*Mor.* 805A). There was a strong semantic link between ambassadors and honor. The πρεσβ– word group connotes honor, rank, and precedent as much as embassies and envoys.[73] Ignatius speaks about the church-appointed envoys in several honorific ways. One, the selected person was to be someone whom the community regarded as "worthy" (*Phld.* 10.2; *Pol*. 7.2) and "especially dear and resolute" (*Pol*. 7.2). The ambassador's virtue and activity reinforced each other—a person with certain qualities would go, and the travel magnified their character (*Smyrn*. 11.3; *Pol.* 7.3). Ambassadorial inscriptions refer to their distinguished character and civic magnanimity, often noting that they were "worthy" of being ambassadors. For example, the decrees about the ambassador Menogenes of Sardis repeat his worthiness and virtue: "he performed this embassy with great dignity in a fashion *worthy* of the city" (III) and "thrice he was considered *worthy* of the same office [of ambassador] on account of his faithful conduct, high character and manliness" (XI).[74] Sending communities selected reputable citizens to serve on embassies.[75] Ignatius instructed the churches to follow this pattern. Two, an ambassador was granted an authoritative status by the community to carry out a specific task. He was officially promoted to speak on behalf of the group. The representatives of the churches in Asia would be an "ambassador of God" and a "God-runner" (*Smyrn.* 11.2; *Pol.* 7.2). Their task came with this honorable designation, perhaps critical for securing hospitality from Christians en route to Antioch and receiving a hearing in Antioch. An important symbol of the ambassador's role was the physical document he carried for the community. An ambassador's most basic responsibility was to convey written messages to their destination.[76] Ignatius' proposed

[73] CGL s.v.
[74] *Sardis* VII.1, inscription #8, documents III–XII, italics added.
[75] *IG* VII 2711 refers to ambassadors as people "of the first rank and dignity." Cf. Bash, *Ambassadors for Christ*, 62–65.
[76] Cf. *Sardis* VII.1, inscription #8, documents II and III.

ambassadors, likewise, were to carry the churches' letter to Antioch (*Smyrn.* 11.3; *Pol*. 8.1). Three, the act of undertaking an embassy brought prestige to the ambassador. Ambassadors who assumed the expenses and risks were benefactors whom the community was obligated to honor. Cities thus heaped praise upon their peers who performed ambassadorial duties.[77] For example, the Panhellenic League in central Greece recognized their ambassador, Epiminondas, for his diplomatic missions in the following way: "Admired for all this and deemed worth of approval, he received honors among the Panhellenes and recognition," and the cities that benefited "hastened to honor him with decrees and citizenship and a placing of portraits."[78] Our primary historical evidence for ancient embassies—inscriptions—was a public symbol of the honoree's status in the community. After Menogenes' return to Sardis, the demos held him "in the highest esteem" and so recognized him with a marble portrait image in the agora; its inscription read, "The people honored Menogenes … who went to Rome as an ambassador."[79] Ignatius promises that the person whom the community deemed worthy of the mission would be "blessed in Jesus Christ" (*Phld* 10.2). This could refer to divine enablement during the journey (cf. *Smyrn.* 11.3) and his reward for completing it (cf. *Pol* 7.2–3). The honorific blessing for the churches' representative was common for ambassadors. In sum, ambassadors were (1) worthy people (2) who were granted an authoritative status and then (3) honored upon its completion. According to Ignatius' instructions, this was also to be the case for the churches' ambassadors to Antioch.

Ignatius directs the bulk of his honorific rhetoric toward the letter recipients—the people he wanted to send ambassadors. The churches' that executed Ignatius' request would enjoy increased status within the broader Christian network. Ignatius tells Philadelphia, "you yourself will be glorified" (*Phld.* 10.1). He likewise promises glory to Polycarp for completing the "eternal deed" of administering the project among the Asian churches (*Pol.* 7.3; 8.1). The church in Smyrna would be "perfect on earth and in heaven" when sending representatives to Antioch (*Smyrn.* 11.2). Most civic embassies were precipitated by the communities' need for external assistance. However, because the Asian churches did not need help from Antioch, Ignatius emphasizes the social reward of honor to stimulate their response. Ignatius' promises of glory to the churches echoes a diplomatic topos. Civic

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[77] Bash, *Ambassadors for Christ*, 66–67; Eilers, "Introduction," 3–4.
[78] *IG* VII 2711 ll 44–46, 51–52; trans. James H. Oliver, "Epaminondas of Acraephia," *GRBS* 12 (1971): 221–37.
[79] *Sardis* VII.1, inscription #8, document III.

communities typically gained enhanced status and honor from a successful embassy. Such precedence and favor would have been implicit when the emperor or magistrate ruled in favor of the community, and even more explicit when the embassies secured a new title for the community, such as μητρόπολις or νεωκόρος. Competition for social honors motivated many embassies from Asian cities in the second century. In light of the communities' potential honor for sending an embassy, Ignatius naturally appealed to "glory" to motivate the churches' travel to Antioch.[80]

Ignatius mentions that the churches' journey to Antioch would also enhance God's glory (*Phld.* 10.1, 2; *Smyrn.* 11.2–3 [3x]; *Pol.* 7.3). As the principal enabler of, and reason for, the travel event, God would also gain prestige from its successful completion. While civic embassies were generally regarded as sacred events, Ignatius' language is peculiarly theological in locating the event within a divine context. Section 8.4 examines the significance of Ignatius' theology regarding the embassy. For now, we note that God was another beneficiary of the glory and honor generated through the churches' diplomatic travel.

We might also consider the social impact of the envoy upon the receiving community in Antioch, even though it remains unstated in Ignatius' letters. Eilers notes that for the recipient/host "embassies themselves were a significant recognition of authority and notable mark of honor."[81] In his *Res Gestae*, Augustus boasted in the embassies sent to him from distant nations (26.4; 31–33), as the envoys represented the extent of his renown and influence. In most instances, the recipient/host of an embassy enjoyed a higher status and possessed the ability to assist.[82] Even when this was not the case, movement toward another party implied some deference; the person is worth moving toward and being in association with. Sections 7.3–4 discussed how the churches' travel to Ignatius honored him, even as a prisoner. Likewise, after a period of persecution, the arrival of fellow Christians from various distant churches affirm and enhance the status of the Antiochian community. The embassy to Antioch would be an honor-generating event, enhancing the status of the traveling ambassador, the sending community, God, and even the receiving community.

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[80] For an analysis of honor values in Greek rhetoric, see deSilva, *Despising Shame*, 30–85.
[81] Eilers, "Introduction," 11.
[82] Bash, *Ambassadors for Christ*, 48–51.

5. Collective Representation. In addition to the ambassadorial language in Ignatius' requests to the churches, a methodological aspect of the travel event reflected a common practice of ancient embassies. Ignatius envisioned the ambassador representing multiple churches in Asia, not just their own local community. Churches would ideally send their own representatives, but those who were unable were to send letters through the Smyrnaean delegate (*Pol.* 8.1), as the Philippians, in fact, did (Pol., *Phil.* 13.1). In this case, the ambassador represented multiple communities banded in a regional collective, as was common in civic embassies. Menogenes' embassy to Caesar Augustus was for the common interests of Sardis and the "Hellenes of Asia," a political body (κοινόν) that issued multiple decrees in his honor.[83] Ambassadors often represented a regional group of communities united through a shared (ethnic, political, or religious) identity. This also appears to have been the case with the churches' embassy to Antioch—their appointed ambassador would represent the broader collective of churches in Asia in congratulating the church in Syria.[84]

The idea of sending ambassadorial representatives from one Christian community to another was hardly unique to Ignatius. The social institution of ancient diplomacy appears to have been familiar to early Christians. The Gospel narratives portray Jesus and his apostles as being sent to carry out a certain function; thus, people should honor and receive them as the one who sent them (Mt 10:40; Lk 10:16; Jn 5:24; 12:44–48; cf. *1 Clem* 42:1–2). In his apostolic ministry, Paul presents himself as a divine ambassador (2 Cor 5:20; Eph 6:20) and appeals to diplomatic practices when sending his envoys to churches (Rom 16:1–2; 1 Cor 16:10–11; Phlm 17; Phil 2:29).[85] In the second century, Christian apologists appealed to the emperor through the conventional forms of ancient diplomacy—the Christians were akin to an ethnic group and their leader represented their interest like an ambassador.[86] Even before Ignatius made his request for the embassies, other Syrian churches had sent representative leaders to Antioch. Early Christians were conversant with standard diplomatic conventions

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[83] *Sardis* VII.1, inscription #8, document VII–X. In *IG*, VII.2711, Epaminondas was appointed to an embassy by the Achaean and Boetian League of cities.

[84] In a parallel argument, Shawn Carruth, "Praise for the Churches: The Rhetorical Function of the Opening Sections of the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch," in *Reimagining Christian Origins: A Colloquium Honoring Burton L. Mack*, ed. Elizabeth A. Castelli and Hal Taussig (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity, 1996), 295–310, notes that the greetings of Ignatius' letters, by using topoi from encomia of ancient cities, present the churches as analogous to a civic polis.

[85] Mitchell, "New Testament Envoys."

[86] James B. Rives, "Diplomacy And Identity Among Jews And Christians," in *Diplomats and Diplomacy in the Roman World*, ed. Claude Eilers (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009), 99–126.

and drew upon them for their communal interactions. Ignatius adopts this Christian tradition and incorporates explicit ambassadorial language to frame and motivate the churches' travel to Antioch.

Ignatius' deliberative rhetoric in the closing appeal of his three letters from Troas seems to have been effective. At least two churches—Smyrna and Philippi—appear to have heeded Ignatius' request and sent representatives. Despite the challenges and costs of travel across provinces, Ignatius' language convinced some churches to mobilize resources and appoint embassies to Antioch. The ambassadorial language in his appeal created a shared understanding and sense of importance about the task, and it was later adopted by the churches when they coordinated the travel in his absence (Pol., *Phil*. 13.1).

Having established that Ignatius presented the travel opportunity as an ambassadorial mission, we now inquire about the purpose and result of that language. Why did Ignatius appeal to the social institution of ancient diplomats and diplomacy? What was the purpose of sending "ambassadors" from Asia to Antioch? And what effect did such a framework have on the meaning of travel and relations between the churches? To address these questions we examine a key purpose of intercivic envoys.

§8.3 Envoys and Intercivic Harmony

Roman rule transformed political life in the Greek cities of Asia. Christopher Jones describes the repercussions of the new social order for Greek civic embassies in particular.

> "Diplomacy between cities has also undergone changes. The main issue is now no longer the cities' need for mutual assistance. The overriding concern is with prestige (*axioma, doxa*), precedence (*prōteia, prostatia, propompeia*), and rights (*dikaia*). These quarrels often led to strife (*stasis*), whose opposite is concord (*homonoia*), a state which can often be achieved only by the strenuous intervention of emperors and governors." [87]

[87] C. P. Jones, *Kinship Diplomacy in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, MS: Harvard University Press, 1999), 112; see also, Louis Robert, "La Titulature de Nicée et de Nicomédie: La Gloire et La Haine," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 81 (1977): 1–39.

In the first and second centuries, diplomatic missions became part of the status competition between the leading cities of Asia Minor. To gain prominence, cities sent embassies to Roman authorities to secure titles and precedence. In other instances, cities would form mutual alliances by sending embassies to establish harmony agreements. These developments of intercivic diplomacy, especially at the time and location of Ignatius' letters, shed light on the purpose of the Asian churches' embassies to Antioch.

The notorious civic feud between Ephesus and Smyrna exemplifies the competitive diplomatic environment. By the late first century, the two leading port cities of Asia Minor jousted over the titles "metropolis" and "neokorate," along with the adjective "first," in their quest for preeminence.[88] The Ephesus-Smyrna rivalry had become proverbial folklore throughout the empire.[89] In his oration, *Concerning Concord*, Aelius Aristides chided the leading Asian cities because they "engaged in faction against themselves…and now vie for first place" (*Or.* 23.12–13).[90] Instead of seeking preeminence, he exhorted the cities to pursue concord by praising others and extending proper honors (*Or.* 23.27–32). Around 140 CE, the conflict boiled over at a joint sacrificial ceremony, where Smyrna failed to address Ephesus by its proper titles. In response, Ephesus sent another embassy to Antonius Pius to enforce its claim as the preeminent city of Asia.[91] Smyrna then sent a delegation of orators to argue that Ephesus could not be the first city of Asia.[92] Second-century graffiti from Smyrna's basilica shows that the civic rivalry was not confined to the political elite. Several inscriptions claim, for Smyrna, the title of "first [city] of Asia."[93] One particular graffito reads "to the first in Asia" in large letters, but then a second hand inserted, "to the Ephesians," as an attempt to

[88] Cf., Dio Chr., *Or.* 38.28–29; Price, *Rituals and Power*, 126–32; Steve Friesen, "The Cult of the Emperors in Ephesos: Temple Wardens, City Titles, and the Interpretation of the Revelation of John," in *Ephesos Metropolis of Asia: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Its Archaeology, Religion, and Culture*, ed. Helmut Koester (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995), 229–50.
[89] Dio Chr., *Or. 34.48*; Cassius Dio, 52.37.10.
[90] Trans. Aelius Aristides, *The Complete Works*, trans. C. A. Behr, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1997).
[91] *IvE* 5.1489–90 (=*SIG3* 849); ET, Oliver, *Greek Constitutions Of Early Roman Emperors*, 135 A/B. In the inscribed decree, the emperor asked Ephesus to overlook Smyrna's omission as "accidental" and admonished Ephesus to address Smyrna with the proper titles, trusting that "in the future they will comply willingly."
[92] Philostratus, *Lives of Sophists* 1.25.539–40 (=LCL, p. 125).
[93] Roger S. Bagnall et al., eds., *Graffiti from the Basilica in the Agora of Smyrna* (New York: NYU Press, 2016), 39, 47–48. The graffiti all predate the collapse of the basilica in 178 CE.

hijack the Smyrnean boasting for Ephesus.[94] The civic rivalry dominated relations between the Asian cities and shaped their use of diplomatic embassies, particularly in the second century CE.

In addition to competing for status, cities used embassies to form civic alliances. These agreements between cities produced a collaborative-based honor. Such concord (*homonoia*) was a political virtue of fundamental importance for the Greek cities of the Roman Empire.[95] Dio Chrysostom, for example, lauded concord in several orations (*Or.* 38–41). He wanted competing cities to view concord as indispensable and supremely important. "Concord," he asserted, "has been lauded by all men always in both speech and writing" and is "the greatest of human blessings" (*Or.* 38.10). Dio appealed to noble-minded communities to forsake strife and quarreling in favor of peace and tranquility, which was obtainable through a common social institution. Greek cities often formulated "concord agreements" (*homonoia*) with one another. A large number of *homonoia* coins indicates how cities established and celebrated these bilateral (sometimes, trilateral) accords.[96] For example, Ephesus–Smyrna and Smyrna–Ephesus–Pergamum *homonoia* coins were issued during Pius' reign (138–61 CE). These accords were perhaps peacemaking efforts amidst their constant rivalry discussed above.\ Most concord agreements celebrated the end of a quarrel between neighboring cities (e.g., over intercity trade, boundaries, marriage, or even titles) or advanced political-business relations between commercial centers.[97] The overall result was a mutual increase in rank for the new partners.

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[94] Roger S. Bagnall, *Everyday Writing in the Graeco-Roman East* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011), 19; *SEG* 61.965.

[95] Aristotle declared that "to promote concord, which seems akin to friendship" was the chief purpose of political leaders (*Nic. Eth.* 1155a). For imperial devotion to *concordia*, see J. Rufus Fears, "The Cult of Virtues and Roman Imperial Ideology," *ANRW* 2.17.2 (1987): 829–40, 891–899.

[96] For an analysis of harmony coins in Asia Minor, cf. Magie, *Roman Rule*, 1496, 1500–01; D. Kienast, "Die Homonoia Verträge in der römischen Kaiserzeit," *Jahresbuch für Numismatik und Geldgeschichte* 14 (1964): 51–63; A.R.R. Sheppard, "Homonoia in the Greek Cities of the Roman Empire," *Ancient Society* 15–17 (1984): 229–52; P. R. Franke and Margaret Karola Nolle, *Die Homonoia-Münzen Kleinasiens* (Saarbrücken, 1997); Filiz Öztürk, *Roma Çağı Küçükasya Kentleri Arasinda: Homonoia Anlaşmaları* (İstanbul: Arkeoloji ve Sanat Yayınları, 2007); Ursala Kampmann, "Homonoia Politics in Asia Minor: The Example of Pergamon," in *Pergamon—Citadel of the Gods: Archaeological Record, Literary Description, and Religious Development*, ed. Helmut Koester (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998), 373–94.

[97] Sheppard, "Homonoia in the Greek Cities," 232 n. 24; Magie, *Roman Rule*, 1500–01 reads such agreements between trade centers as a "commercial bond" of some sort.

The formation of *homonoia* agreements required a corporate celebration, during which delegates from one city would visit the partner city.[98] During the ritual ceremonies, foreign delegations would parade into the host city. Then the delegates would meet publicly and offer a joint sacrifice. The *homonoia* coins issued after the festival often showed the cities' gods shaking hands over an altar. This iconography mirrored the ceremonial meeting of the delegates. The sending of representatives to the festivals marked the divine harmony established between cities.[99] In summary, *homonoia* ceremonies were a means for cities to increase their stature by appointing representatives to represent their socio-political interests with and in another city.[100]

Ignatius and his audiences would have been familiar with this common form of civic embassy. The vast majority of *homonoia* coins were issued by leading cities in Asia Minor—Smyrna, Ephesus, Pergamum, Sardis, and Laodicea.[101] Each of those cities had known Christian communities in the first century (cf. Rev 2–3) and were located on Ignatius' travel route. They were among the communities which Ignatius expected to send ambassadors to Antioch. The dynamics of civic diplomacy in Asian cities at that time suggest that the churches' embassies to Antioch would have concerned *homonoia*, a demonstration of unity between the churches.

The civic virtue of concord appears throughout Ignatius' letters as part of his concern about ecclesiastical unity.[102] In addition to eight occurrences of the noun,[103] several rhetorical elements in Ignatius' letters elaborate the topos of *homonoia*.[104] His imagery of music,[105] body,[106] and temple[107] was common in political discussions about concord. The language of

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[98] For the festival events, see Kampmann, "Homonoia Politics in Asia Minor: The Example of Pergamon," 389.
[99] Price, *Rituals and Power*, 127.
[100] *Homonoia* was not a legal structure, as there are no written *homonoia* contracts.
[101] Sheppard, "Homonoia in the Greek Cities," 234. P. R. Franke, *Zu den Homonoia-Münzen Kleinasiens* (Boon: Hablet, 1987), 90 estimates that 24 million homonoia coins (from around 160 cities, mostly in Asia Minor) were in circulation between the first and third centuries.
[102] For analysis of these passages with *homonoia*, see Lotz, *Ignatius and Concord*, 60–62, 144–55, 158–73.
[103] *Eph.* 4.1, 2; 13.1; *Magn.* 6.1; 15.1; *Trall.* 12.2; *Phld.* inscr.; 11.2.
[104] Maier, "Rhetoric of Discord and Concord," 314–317.
[105] *Eph.* 4.1–2; *Magn.* 1.2; *Rom.* 2.2; *Phld* 1.2.
[106] *Trall.* 11.2; *Smyrn.* 1.2.
[107] *Eph.* 5.2; 9.2; 15.3; *Magn.* 7.2; *Trall.* 7.2; *Phld.* 4.1.

being united in heart[108] and mind[109] exhorted readers toward *homonoia*. Ignatius also evoked the motif through the repetitious use of the terms "common,"[110] "together,"[111] "one,"[112] and "unity."[113] The *homonoia* concept pervaded Ignatius' letters. He expected unity within the church, as Christians were members of Christ who shared in the "unity of God."[114]

What did Ignatius mean by "concord" and "unity" among the churches? The language has been read as Ignatius' desire for ecclesiastical hierarchy within a local community, as though harmony meant submission to the bishop's authority as God's representative. Schoedel claims, "We may assume that union has to do with the solidarity of the community in social and cultic terms and lacks deeper mystical significance."[115] Maier also emphasizes the socio-political dimensions of Ignatius' harmony rhetoric; unity was "ritual unity with rightly confessing leaders."[116] In this consensus view, unity was Ignatius' antidote to internal division.[117] But an evaluation of Ignatius' use of *homonoia* indicates that his vision of unity was not merely a local ecclesiastical structure centered upon the bishop's authority. Four of the eight occurrences of *homonoia* do not correlate the virtue with local leadership structures (*Eph.* 13.1; *Magn.* 15.1; *Phld.* inscr.; 11.2). To consider the wider social dimensions of *homonoia* in Ignatius, we examine the concept in its theological context and epistolary benedictions. These considerations suggest that *homonoia* was a transregional reality that churches shared across space. Harmony *between* churches was just as vital for Ignatius as harmony *within* churches.

Harmony for Ignatius was, foremost, participation in a heavenly unity.[118] Harmony makes the community a chorus singing "through Jesus Christ to the Father" that demonstrates they "are members of his Son" and "have a share in God" (*Eph.* 4.2). All believers possessed a

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[108] *Trall.* 13.2; *Phld.* 6.3.
[109] *Eph.* 3.2; 4.1; 11.2; 20.2; *Magn.* 7.1; *Smyrn.* 4.1.
[110] *koinos—Eph.* 1.2; 20.2; 21.2; *Phld.* 1.1; 5.2; 11.2; *Pol.* 5.3.
[111] *sun- —Eph.* 3.2; 9.2; 13:1; *Magn.* 7.1; 10:3; Pol 6.1 (6x); *epi to auto—Eph.* 13.1; *Phld.* 6.2; 10.1.
[112] *hen—Eph.* 2.2; 4.2; 7.2; 11.2; 15.1; 20.2; *Magn.* 7.1–2 (10x); *Phld.* inscr.; 4.1 (4x); *Smyrn* 1.2.
[113] *henōtēs—Eph.* 1.2; 5.1; 14.1; *Phld.* 2.2; 5.2; 8.1; 9.1; *Smyrn.* 12.2; *Pol.* 8.3; *henōsis—Magn.* 1.2; 13.2; *Phld* 7.2; 8.1; *Poly* 1.2; 5.2.
[114] *en henotēti theou—Phld.* 9.1; *Smyrn.* 12.2; *Pol.* 8.3.
[115] Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 22.
[116] Maier, "Rhetoric of Discord and Concord," 318.
[117] Corwin, *St. Ignatius*, 247–51.
[118] Lotz, *Ignatius and Concord*, 175–76.

common unity with God in Christ. While submission to the bishop was a local expression of such harmony, all believers were united through a soteriological harmony with God. This common inheritance fostered a larger, transregional identity among Christians beyond their local community. In addition to the mystical union, Ignatius portrays harmony as an eschatological victory over Satan. Unity destroys his destructive powers (*Eph.* 13). *Homonoia* extended beyond local ecclesiastical hierarchies and reflected universal, even cosmic, realities.

Ignatius mentions *homonoia* in two concluding benedictions. The epistolary conclusion in *Magn.* 14–15 reveals the connections between five prominent cities. The Magnesians prayed for Antioch and they received greetings from the Ephesians and other churches (at least Smyrna and Tralles) who were gathered in Smyrna. In the era of intense civic rivalry, the mention of Ephesians being together with Smyrneans might have been an unexpected irony for Magnesian readers. The greetings from the dueling cities highlighted their common bond as Christians in Christ.[119] This regional gathering of churches in Smyrna depicts the transregional nature of Christian *homonoia*. After the discussion of relations between Christians in various cities, the letter closes, "Farewell in godly harmony (ἐν ὁμονοίᾳ θεοῦ) to you who possess an undivided spirit, which is Jesus Christ" (15.1). Christians in different cities experienced this divine unity as they interfaced each across space. Ignatius' letter to Philadelphia (Chs. 10–12), written after peace had reached Antioch, follows a similar logic. Ignatius alludes to the Philadelphians' prior prayers for Antioch and his present desire for them to visit Syria; the church in Philadelphia welcomed messengers from Syria, which expressed their union with both Christ and the church in Antioch (12.1); believers in Troas sent greetings to Philadelphia, in a letter transported by an Ephesian supported by the Smyrneans. These inter-city connections expressed the believers' hope in Christ "with faith, love, and harmony" (πίστει, ἀγάπῃ, ὁμονοίᾳ; *Phld.* 11.2). The links between cities embodied the harmony of God. From the theological and epistolary context of *homonoia* occurrences in Ignatius' letters, we may conclude that Ignatius' view of harmony extended beyond the laity-bishop relationship to include inter-city Christian relations. Ecclesiastical harmony started within but also transcended the boundaries of local communities.

[119] Lotz, *Ignatius and Concord*, 155.

Homonoia was not merely a state of peace or kind of being, but an embodied and enacted expression of Christ's incarnated love.[120] The unity was real and active, like a chorus singing a tune (*Eph.* 4.1) or celebrants joining in a procession (*Eph.* 9.2). Ignatius exhorted the churches to experience union with God by actively participating in the universal church (ἡ καθολικὴ ἐκκλησία; *Smyrn.* 8.2). Christians sent prayers, assistance, and delegates to other Christians to symbolize that unity. The embassies to Antioch would embody their collective solidarity. Their physical presence with the group who had suffered *was* unity. This claim does not deny the obvious importance of harmonious relations between the local laity and bishop in Ignatius' letters (*Eph.* 4.1; 4.2; *Magn.* 6.1; *Trall.* 12.2), but aims to broaden the scope of Christian unity in Ignatius' thought. He viewed the churches from Rome through Macedonia and Asia to Syria as a band of united communities.[121] Harmony could be achieved across space by Christians in different cities. So he mobilized the churches to demonstrate such harmony by sending ambassadors to Antioch. This intercivic dimension of *homonoia* in Ignatius reflects the term's general usage in political discourse, in which concord was mostly *between* cities.[122]

At this point, we can summarize the argument. The peace in Antioch was the cessation of persecution. Ignatius used ambassadorial language when asking churches to visit Antioch. In second-century Asia Minor, a common function of embassies was to promote harmony, and harmony among Christians was a central concern for Ignatius. Therefore, we surmise that Ignatius' request for the church to appoint ambassadors was a concerted effort to foster concord and unity between Christians across cities. The final section considers the purpose and impact of the Christian embassies to Antioch in the network of early Christian communities.

§8.4 The Meanings of the Envoys to Antioch

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[120] Lotz, *Ignatius and Concord*, 172.

[121] Nicolae Roddy, "The Campaign for Catholicity in the Letters of Saint Ignatius of Antioch," *Coptic Church Review* 12, no. 2 (1991): 49–57.

[122] Aristides' *Concerning Concord, Or. 23* was about relations between Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamum; Dio's orations sought to establish harmony between Apamea and Prusa, Nicaea and Nicomedia; *homonoia* coins celebrated and depicted agreements between two cities. Sheppard divided his overview on the topic, "*Homonoia* in the Greek Cities of the Roman Empire," into two sections: "Concord Between Cities" (230–40) and "Concord Within the City" (241–52).

The Asian churches' future travel to Antioch paralleled their past travel to Ignatius. They would support those who had suffered in Syria, similar to how they had supported Antioch's convicted bishop. Ignatius himself benefited when the churches visited him and had already connected those churches to Antioch through prayer (cf. *Eph.* 21.2; *Magn.* 14; *Trall.* 13.1). So, once the situation had stabilized and outsiders could visit Antioch, it would have been natural for him to promote a personal connection between the Asian churches and his former community in Antioch, who would also benefit from the churches' visiting.[123] Similar dynamics propelled the churches' travel to both Ignatius in Smyrna (Ch. 7) and his church in Antioch—namely, to encourage and assist fellow believers who suffered opposition. By sending embassies, the Asian churches would again bear significant risks and costs to embody their solidarity with persecuted Christians. Moreover, their intentional association with former persecutees further reflect their cruciform standards of worth and honor. Despite the marginal status of believers in Antioch, they were worthy of a visit from Asia, regardless of the financial costs or social fallout.

Exactly what would the Asian churches have congratulated the Antiochians for? Did the believers in Antioch win a court case, secure an imperial decree, fend off an attack from pagan opponents, overcome Jewish oppositions, appoint a new bishop, banish the heretics, or reconstruct their gathering space? We have scant textual information about the historical situation in Antioch. The messengers from Syria, Philo and Rhaius Agathopus, had already reported on the situation when they passed through Philadelphia and Smyrna, so Ignatius had no need to repeat background details in his letters to them. Nevertheless, we may consider whether the embassies congratulated them for admirably facing and overcoming opposition. Considering that the leader was condemned to death for the name, the believers in Antioch likely faced similar opposition due to their Christian identity. The Asian churches may well have congratulated them for their faithful endurance, which could have been construed as a divine victory over evil. Early Christians tended to honor those who endured persecution,[124] and Ignatius' willing acceptance of martyrdom accorded him stature among the churches. So, it seems plausible that the churches were to affirm Antioch for their faithfulness amidst persecution.

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[123] Zahn, *Ignatius von Antiochien*, 285.

[124] Early Christians' exaltation of Jesus' crucifixion, encapsulated in early Gospel narratives, exemplifies this point. See also, Acts 5:41; 17.3; Rom 8:17–18; 2 Cor 11:16–33; 2 Thess 1.5; Heb 11; 1 Pet 4:16; Rev 2:13; 6:9.

How would the embassies have expressed such congratulations? Perhaps they presented financial assistance, bore a gift before Roman authorities on their behalf, or took a vote to recognize a new bishop or the churches' official status. We propose the main expression of their congratulations occurred as they joined in the distinctly Christian communal ritual. Christians from multiple churches would gather together for the Eucharist—the trademark of Christian harmony (*Eph.* 5; 13; 20.2; *Phld.* 4; *Smyrn.* 6). An exhortation to the Ephesians reveals Ignatius' vision for church harmony and illuminates the envoy's purpose in Antioch—"Hasten to come together more often for the Eucharist and glorify God (συνέρχεσθαι εἰς εὐχαριστίαν θεοῦ καὶ εἰς δόξαν). Whenever you gather together regularly, the powers of Satan and his destructive forces are destroyed by harmony of your faith (ἐν τῇ ὁμονοίᾳ ὑμῶν τῆς πίστεως)" (*Eph.* 13.1, trans. mine). The Asian ambassadors were to unite with the Antiochian community to glorify the name (δοξάσαι τὸ ὄνομα; *Phld.* 10.1), which suggests a divine service of thanksgiving based on the parallel of δοξ- and εὐχαριστία in *Eph.* 13.1. Ignatius, we propose, sought to unite the churches with each other by having them come together (literally!) for communion in Antioch. Just as pagan *homonoia* ceremonies culminated with the delegates participating in a joint sacrifice to the gods, Christians' delegates could ratify their *homonoia* by joining together in Antioch to celebrate the Christian sacrificial ritual.

The fact that the Antioch church could at last gather was significant for Ignatius. To minimize political disturbances, Roman authorities often forbade troublesome groups to assemble. Trajan, for example, issued an edict that prohibited any societies (*hetaeriae*) such as firefighters or Christians from gathering corporately.[125] After enduring such a season, the church in Antioch was now capable of meeting together as a corporate entity. The community has been re-founded and reconstituted as a group. This development served as the basis of the Asian envoys. The Philadelphians were to congratulate Antioch "when they have assembled together" (ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ γενομένοις; *Phld.* 10.1), a phrase that refers to the Eucharistic gathering of believers.[126] The envoy from Smyrna was instructed to congratulate the church

[125] Pliny, *Ep.* x.34.1; x.96.7.

[126] Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 213 contends that ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ γενομένοις "is always set in opposition to disunity elsewhere in Ignatius." However, in *Eph*. 5.3 and 13.1 the term refers to the entire church gathering with the bishop, seemingly for the Eucharist. The phrase is often paired with συνέρχομαι, which

in Antioch because they "have regained their proper stature and their corporate life has been restored to its proper state" (ἀπέλαβον τὸ ἴδιον μέγεθος καὶ ἀπεκατεστάθη αὐτοῖς τὸ ἴδιον σωματεῖον; *Smyrn.* 11.2). The restoration of the assembly in its full size was significant for Ignatius because the corporate meeting defined the church. The ambassadors would thus affirm Antioch's new collective status and magnitude as an ἐκκλησία. Ignatius was grateful that the believers in Antioch could function as a church by gathering together for the Eucharist. So he wanted Christians from other cities to recognize and ratify Antioch's new status, specifically by joining their gathering in person. The ambassadorial journey would in effect confirm the church's reconstituted presence in Antioch.

The reciprocal nature of ancient embassies also sheds light on the social dynamics of the churches' envoys to Antioch. Sending congratulations through an ambassador was a symbolic gesture to cultivate reciprocal ties. The Greek cities that congratulated Alexander did so to cultivate "treaties of friendships and alliance" (Arrian, *Anabasis* 7.113.1). The nations that sent congratulatory embassies to Augustus formed "friendships" with Rome (*Res Gestae* 31–33). People wanted to associate with prominent figures, and cities did that through embassies. The aim of congratulatory embassies was to cement diplomatic ties and form reciprocal relations.[127] Extant ambassadorial letters give the impression that embassies were largely ceremonial rituals (not legal procedures or economic exchanges). The symbolism was the main point for both parties.[128] The Asian churches' ambassadorial travel symbolized "friendship" with Antioch. The visiting embassies likely stood to benefit from stronger ties with the important and influential church in Antioch. The church in Antioch enjoyed a certain prestige on several accounts. It was significant in the early Church's mission (Acts 11:19–26; 13:1–3), the home of Ignatius, faithful amidst persecution, and located in a provincial capital. Strong relations with a prominent church would help the visiting churches' own standing. These realities helped propel the Asian churches to send ambassadors and develop a friendship with the Antiochian church. The embassy-sending churches also stood to benefit from the mutual relations.

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emphasizes the physical nature of the gathering. Other early Christian texts use the phrase for the public assembly of Christians in a single location (not just social unity); cf., 1 Cor 11:20; 14:23; *Barn.* 4.10; Justin, 1 *Apol.* 67.3.

[127] Polly Low, *Interstate Relations in Classical Greece: Morality and Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); contra Bash, *Ambassadors for Christ*, 48–51, which emphasized the supplicant nature of embassies.

[128] Eck, "Diplomacy as Administrative Process," 195.

Ignatius used theological language throughout his appeals to place the embassies within a sacred domain. The actual task of sending ambassadors was "a deed worthy of God" (*Smyrn.* 11.3), "God's work…a good work" (*Pol.* 7.3), and "an eternal deed" (*Pol* 8.1). The embassies were a sacred event. Despite the costs, the embassy was "certainly not impossible" (*Phld.* 8.2) because, as Ignatius informed the churches, "God is ready to help you" (*Smyrn.* 11.2). God would provide the necessary resources, and he would also reap the benefit of enhanced glory (*Phld.* 10.1, 2; *Smyrn.* 11.2; *Pol.* 7.3). Ignatius emphasizes God's centrality in the embassies to the point of redundancy. "God's church" in Philadelphia would send "God's ambassador" "for the name of God" (*Phld.* 10.1–2). In Smyrna, a "God-blessed" council would appoint "God's courier," who was "devoted to God," "to the glory of God" (*Pol.* 7.2–3). God was the originator, supplier, and purpose of the churches' embassies. The embassies became a religious act. This reality raises the importance of the travel and relativizes the material and physical costs. Participation with God in his sacred activity was worth the expenses. In contrast to Paul (cf. 2 Cor 5:18–20; Eph 6:20), Ignatius does not use ambassadorial language as a theological metaphor. Instead, his language of embassies refers to an actual process of travel and communication between Greco-Roman cities.[129] But he situates that travel within a divine framework so that the churches' movement assumes distinct theological meaning. This was not original to Ignatius, as embassies in antiquity had a sacred dimension. Greek ambassadors were sacred and inviolable; they were under the gods' protection.[130] Ignatius drew upon this tradition in an innovative and subversive manner. He claimed a divine status for embassies between Christian communities, a group that Roman authorities hardly acknowledged. A small community of Christ-followers in a given city presumed the same sacred status as civic elites appointed on an embassy to the emperor. Such significance would have seemed ridiculous to their pagan contemporaries. Yet, the divine language reassured the Christians of God's provision and direction, not only over their travels but over his church as a whole. Upon their arrival in Antioch, the embassies would witness the preservation and vindication of God's people who were brought safely through the storm. The orchestration of embassies could have boosted morale among the churches. The people of God would jointly celebrate their vindication over opposition.

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[129] Similar to Luke-Acts; cf. Lk 14:32; 19:14; for implicit embassies, cf. Lk. 7:1–10; Acts 12:20; 15:1–4; see also Bash, *Ambassadors for Christ*, 140–52.

[130] Josephus, *Ant.* 15.137; Just., *Dig.* 50.7.17; Dio Chr., *Or.* 38.18, 22; Bash, *Ambassadors for Christ*, 53; Jones, *Kinship Diplomacy*, 2.

§8.5 Conclusions

After Ignatius heard that his church in Antioch was at peace, he asked churches around the Aegean to travel and visit Antioch. This chapter has sought to interpret the meaning of this remarkable and unparalleled request. The occasion prompting Ignatius' appeal was the recent cessation of external persecution (not harmony after internal conflict). His extensive instructions to the churches framed their visit to Antioch in terms of an ancient embassy, a well-established institution that Greek cities used to promote harmony. In that light, Ignatius' request for the churches to send delegates was a concerted effort to foster unity between Christians across cities. The sacred journey, which brought the churches together for the Eucharist, confirmed the reconstitution of the church in Antioch and other cities' proper relationship with them.

The embassies to Antioch reveals the extant of early Christians' relational networks and transregional identity. Churches from Syria had already visited Antioch; churches in Smyrna and Philippi planned to send representatives; and Ignatius would likely ask the church in Rome to also participate in the congratulations. The various delegations to Syria would have required a developed and solidified network of Christian communities across the Roman Empire. The capacity to actualize the travel event assumed a notable degree of logistical coordination and communication between cities. Travel both indicated and increased the capacity and resiliency of the church network. By asking cities to assume the civic task of sending embassies to other communities to promote harmony, Ignatius might have been fostering, albeit only by way of implication, a sort of panhellenic κοινόν among the churches,[131] or a type of kinship diplomacy in which the cities imaged a familial link.[132] Regardless of the broader nature of the union among the churches, travel fostered a transregional collective identity for early Christians. By virtue of this common identity,

[131] In the Second Sophistic period, figures such as Hadrian, Aelius Aristides, and Dio of Prusa were active promoters of a broader Greek identity among the cities of the Greek East; cf. Laura Salah Nasrallah, "The Acts of the Apostles, Greek Cities, and Hadrian's Panhellenion," *JBL* 127, no. 3 (2008): 533–66; for the proposal that Ignatius might have desired for the churches to embody (and overtake) the ideals of the Greek *polis*, see Carruth, "Praise for the Churches," 308.

[132] Sue Elwyn, "Interstate Kinship and Roman Foreign Policy," *TAPA* 123 (1993): 261–86; Jones, *Kinship Diplomacy*, 106–22.

Christians sacrificed to support fellow believers. Within this milieu of early Christians' translocal identity, the embassies to Antioch bore witness to the extant and durability of the social connections that united Christians across space.

Conclusion

Early Christians traveled, and their travel had meaning. In 1904, William Ramsay remarked that while many have described the importance of travel between early Christian communities, "perhaps all has not been said that ought to be said on the subject."[1] Ramsay and his German contemporary, Adolf von Harnack, inaugurated a new era of research into early Christian travel that has continued, with the aid of various social-scientific and critical approaches, into the twenty-first century. Yet, more could (and hopefully has been!) said on the subject of early Christian travel.

As outlined in Chapter 1, previous scholarship has interpreted early Christian travel as mission expansion, imperial triumph, social formation, network connection, and hegemonic power. A concise label describing my approach to early Christian travel would be "ideological expression." That is to say, physical movement between communities performed the social and theological convictions of early Christians. Their travel was not just travel. The culturally-embedded social act of movement, performed within a matrix of social conventions and theological beliefs, expressed the group's ideology. The various acts of travel between Christian communities had the effect of reflecting, summoning, crystalizing, and creating the social and theological ideas and ideals of it participants. The non-discursive act of movement, perhaps to the same degree as the words that early Christians textualized as gospels, epistles, and apocalypses, communicated their beliefs about themselves and God. Travel among early Christians was an act of "ideological expression." Therefore, we can approach the rather pedestrian act of travel as a viable and vital source of information about early Christianity, not just the history of its geographical expansion but also its communal dynamics and theological convictions.

Amid the abundance of early Christian travel, I selected five specific travel events to examine in depth. The letters of Paul and Ignatius, in particular, have provided a particularly rich archive of first-hand travel information and ad-hoc interpretation of travel. For this reason, this work has focused on specific travel events in communities associated with Paul (Part II, Chapters 3–5) and Ignatius (Part III, Chapters 6–8). The narrow scope of a few case studies

[1] Ramsay, *Seven Churches*, 1.

has afforded a thick description of particular movements, yet neglected many others. Further research could apply the same approach to other travel events among early Christians. These might include travel in the life of Christ,[2] the ministry of Paul,[3] other apostolic networks such as John's and Peter's, and the post-apostolic era.[4] Early Christians participated in hundreds of travel events between their communities. Because each one carried a unique meaning within its particular social context, I have chosen and interpreted select travel events on a case-by-case basis in light of authorial representations and ancient social institutions for travel. The case-study approach avoids the tendency to aggregate all travel events or analyze travel in generalities. The individual chapters of this thesis illustrate the broad variety of meanings attributed to different travel events. Paul's journey into Galatia expressed and accomplished something different from Onesimus' return to Colossae, or the Asian churches' visit to Antioch. Each travel event occurred in a unique historical moment and social context, which lends specific meanings to that act of travel.

Without ignoring the nuances of each movement, we can still trace common threads running through the different travel events. This final chapter draws together common themes about the study, nature, and meaning of early Christian travel that were present in the events analyzed in Chapters 3–8. The conclusions are organized under the main categories outlined in the Introduction: historical context, social meaning, and theological convictions.

§9.1 Historical Context: Interpretative and Methodological Contributions

The social and theological implications of travel rest upon actual physical movements. The microscopic analysis of the physical movement—who traveled where, when, and why?—is a prerequisite for assessing the meanings of early Christian travel. As far as the evidence allows, I have attempted a detailed reconstruction of the geography and chronology of travel events at the outset of each topic (§3.1 for Paul's travel into Galatia; §4.2 for the geography

[2] Gospel narratives depict Jesus as an itinerant teacher. He traveled around the countryside of Galilee (Matt 4:23; 8:1–9:35), participated in festivals in Jerusalem (John 2:13; 5:1; 10:22; 12:12), and took a final journey to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51–19:47).
[3] His travels within Greece, particularly to and from Philippi, Thessaloniki, and Corinth, would prove to be fertile ground for such investigations as they are reflected upon in Paul's own letters and Acts.
[4] E.g., *Did.* 11–13; *1 Clem.* 1.2; 63–65; *Herm*. 8.3; 38.10; 50, 76, 102–104; *M. Pol.* inscr.; 20.

of travel in Phlm; Chapter 6 for travel in Ignatius' letters). This attentive analysis of travel details has yielded historical and exegetical conclusions, which I can now summarize.

Paul traveled to southern Galatia along the Via Augusta through social connections with Sergius Paulus and others. Paul's ἀσθένεια referred to his physical disfiguration from persecution, which signified his social rejection and inferiority. Galatians 4:12–20 is a coherent section that corresponds to Paul's theological argument throughout the letter.

Paul's letter to Philemon was written from Ephesus to Colossae in the mid-50s. Philemon functioned as a host for the local Christian assembly and for itinerating Christians in Colossae. The phrase "refreshing the saints" in Phlm 1:6 refers to such acts of hospitality. Onesimus learned about Paul through his co-workers when they visited Philemon in Colossae. Their travel created pathways for future access.

When a problem arose, Onesimus departed from Philemon's household to seek out Paul as a potential mediator between him and Philemon. A key to interpreting Paul's request in Phlm is realizing that Onesimus' primary social identity had changed and that Phlm does address the matter of manumission. Paul wrote Phlm as a letter of commendation on behalf of Onesimus and expected Philemon to host him as a gospel worker.

Ignatius took the land route across Asia Minor, passing through various cities with Christian communities. His presence in Asia sparked a flurry of travel that exceeded 22,000 total kilometers. Ignatius probably traveled with a sizeable entourage, including several Christians, who lodged with Christian communities in different cities. Ignatius appears to have corresponded with many churches, though only seven letters that originated from or passed through Smyrna have been preserved.

While Ignatius was in Smyrna, churches from the Meander Valley and Ephesus visited the prisoner to offer encouragement and material support—a common activity for early Christians in light of their theological convictions regarding suffering and martyrdom. The basis of Ignatius' conviction and the distress in Antioch was external persecution of the Christian community, not internal discord. Ignatius then requested that the Asian churches send embassies to Syria to promote intercivic harmony among the distant churches.

In addition to these exegetical and historical conclusions, this thesis has introduced and modeled a particular methodology for interpreting travel. Chapter 2 introduced an assemblage of critical theories that reveal how non-discursive physical movement encodes and expresses ideology. The emerging field of mobility studies explains how all movement bears meaning derived from its social context (§2.1). Approaching travel as an economic activity has revealed the costs, benefits, and value latent in a travel event (§2.2). Travel also shapes the social identity of its participants, as physical movement socially dislocates travelers and reveals the character of hosts (§2.3). This tripartite hermeneutical approach to travel has proved useful for discerning the significance of travel, as it reveals important aspects of specific travel events —i.e., meaning, value, and identity—without constraining or predetermining the results.

In addition to the broader methodological tools of Chapter 2, I have leveraged an assortment of social models, both ancient institutions and contemporary concepts, to better contextualize and interpret early Christian travel. Paul's travel into Galatia ran along social connections explained by ancient *itineraria* and Granovetter's sociological concepts of embeddedness and weak ties. The Mediterranean practice of hospitality, along with the Ben Franklin effect (i.e., people thinking highly of those whom they help), shed light on the Galatians' welcome of Paul and its social importance. The Greek social institution of πρόξενια informs Philemon's role as a host within the Christian community. Movement was facilitated by the network of Roman roads passing through the Lycus valley. Meanwhile, the social practices of *amicus domini* and letter commendations explain Onesimus' movements. The churches' visit to Ignatius carried meaning in light of ancient prison visits. The social institutions of intercivic ambassadors and *homonoia* agreements shaped the churches' visitation to Antioch.

Ancient social institutions (e.g., hospitality, πρόξενια, *amicus domini*, embassies, *homonoia*) structured and facilitated travel. They reduced the frictions of travel and provided pathways for potential mobility by structuring social relations across space. People from different communities could relate to one another through such institutionalized norms, which produced recognizable social identities and roles. These customary arrangements mitigated hostility and promoted hospitality when a traveler was socially dislocated. Because of their social importance in antiquity, such social institutions provide heuristic value for interpreting early Christian travel. They contextualize movement and, thus, illuminate its social meanings. The social institutions were not rigid templates that dictated relations or behaviors but, rather,

general patterns to be modified based on exigencies. Much of the meaning of early Christian travel stems from the ways that Christians utilized, adapted, and customized ancient patterns surrounding travel. This approach to travel illustrates how the early Christians, through their travel, participated in contemporary society yet also forged an alternate social reality according to their distinctive social praxis and theological convictions as Christians.

§9.2 Social Meaning: Travel and Christian Identity

Travel enabled and fostered Christian identity. Members of the new movement learned and expressed their communal participation and social roles through travel events. Intercommunal movement shaped their Christian identity at the regional, local, and personal levels

The structure and relationship of geographically dispersed Christian communities have received long-standing scholarly attention. Various scholars have noted the interconnectivity of churches, which allegedly reflects a certain ideological unity. Ramsay, for example, said that "communication is the greatest factor in the developing of the Church," as travel linked provincial churches into one Universal Church.[5] Meeks characterized the early Pauline churches as "a network of local groups that wants to be a single 'assembly of God' in the whole world."[6] Likewise, Bauckham argued that the early Christian movement was "a network of communities in constant and close communication with one another," and so shared literature among themselves.[7] Such voices foreground the remarkable connectivity and general unity of Christians across the Mediterranean world. Other scholars see early Christian communities as fragmented and distinct from one another. Bauer's influential *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (1934, ET 1971) foregrounded the diversity and isolation of early Christianities. Following Bauer's thesis, redaction critics of the Gospels postulated a specific *Sitz im Leben* and discrete target audience behind each gospel.[8] Scholars have also argued that the communities of Paul, John, Peter, and other charismatic leaders were

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[5] Ramsay, *Seven Churches*, 21.
[6] Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 190.
[7] Bauckham, *Gospels for All Christians*, 3. About the circular nature and catholic audience of the epistles, see Smith, *Epistles for All Christians*; Ian J. Elmer, "The Pauline Letters as Community Documents," in *Collecting Early Christian Letters: From the Apostle Paul to Late Antiquity*, ed. Bronwen Neil and Pauline Allen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 37–53.
[8] E.g., G. D. Kilpatrick, *The Origins Of The Gospel According To St Matthew* (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1946); J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968).

ideologically distinct and isolated from each other. The rival factions "had little contact with one another" except in hostile confrontations.[9] Some have questioned the strength and extent of ties between the various communities. Concannon depicted the links between communities as fragile and shifting[10] and Ascough argued that early Christian congregations were local groups with "limited translocal connections."[11] Regarding this topic of (dis)unity among early Christians, the instances of travel covered herein suggest a rather high degree of connectivity and translocal identity among Christians. Communities in different geographical locations knew about each other, traveled to each other, and communicated with each other. Travel required, and then produced, a measure of transregional Christian identity. Mobility and fellowship between cities were co-constitutive for early Christians.

The regularity and manner of early Christian travel mirrored the way ancient elites approached travel.[12] They relied upon well-developed social networks and utilized letters of commendation to enable travel. In this way, the emergent Christian movement punched above its (social) weight in developing their own travel and hospitality network among local communities. Ancient travel was predicated upon social connections; it was not a self-determined or isolated action. For Christians to move across space meant knowing and finding fellow Christians in new locations and receiving hospitality from them. Travel among early Christians would have required a developed network based on mutual trust and common religious identities that extended beyond local affiliations. The fact that Christians could logistically travel reflects a common bond across space. The subsequent paragraphs consider the ideological factors that enabled such translocal movement among Christians.

Ancient travel and hospitality involved notable material, physical, and social costs. The broader Christian community often shared in the burden of those travel expenses, even for people with whom they were not personally acquainted. This was a regular theme in the travel events examined. The Galatians experienced shame for welcoming their unsightly guest. This experience of hosting Christian itinerants fortified not only their in-group religious identity but also their Christian identity before outsiders. Hosting the traveler

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[9] Sim, "The Gospels for All Christians?," 11.
[10] Concannon, "Assemblages in Ignatius"; Concannon, *Assembling Early Christianity*.
[11] Richard S. Ascough, "Translocal Relationships Among Voluntary Associations and Early Christianity," *JECS* 5, no. 2 (1997): 223–41.
[12] Huebner, "Travel by the Lower Classes," 112–13.

publicized their participation in the new social group, for which they could face consequences in their local communities. The arrival of Onesimus forced Philemon to welcome a social inferior and offender back into his household. Philemon had lost face through Onesimus' departure and likely desired to avenge his name. However, he was expected to forego any honor-restoring vengeance and instead welcome Onesimus. In the instance of Ignatius' journey, the churches in Asia faced significant costs in associating with the convict and the recently persecuted church in Antioch. Their financial costs included travel over long distances and material assistance for their fellow Christians. In terms of social costs, their visits meant publicly identifying with a maligned and persecuted social group. Travel elicited acts of sacrifice. The willingness, or at least expectation, of early Christians to assume the costs of travel reveals the extent of their commitment and corresponding social identity as Christians. They bore significant costs during travel to publicly identify with fellow Christians because of some measure of group commonality. In the travel events analyzed, being Christian was costly. This fact reflects the value they attributed to expressing their Christian identity through translocal communications.

Travel induced significant losses but also produced certain benefits. Considering the challenges of ancient travel, an established social economy was necessary to support transregional communication. For the possibility of travel, participant behavior had to be motivated by potential gains. Early Christian travel was animated not by the conventional motives of economic or military gain but, instead, by communal participation and recognition. Travel among early Christians generated honor and fostered friendships by stimulating the exchange of resources, such as personal letters, gifts, hospitality, gratitude, and enhanced reputations. Through travel events, Christians formed and experienced communal belonging within a transregional network. Such connectivity was rarely obtainable for non-elites in the Roman Empire. However, through the travels of people associated with Paul or Ignatius, an ordinary believer in Colossae, for example, had potential connections and name recognition with people in Antioch or Rome. Travel allowed for membership in a community stretching across the Mediterranean. Movement within the Christian social network allowed people to connect and belong.

The implicit costs and benefits associated with travel expose the shared values and ideological convictions underpinning the logistics of communication between the communities. Travel requires and confirms a common social identity with people in separate

locations. Travel among early Christians reflected their shared religious identity rooted in their association with Christ.

Recent scholarly interest in the material culture of early Christianity has emphasized the "scribal culture" and "bookish nature" of the movement.[13] Compared to other religious groups in the ancient world, early Christians had a notable proclivity for authoring, reading, copying, and circulating texts. This tendency shaped the group's practice and identity.[14] Judith Lieu notes that early Christian letters were "instrumental in the creation of a distinctive Christian worldview."[15] Without contesting those insights, I propose that the early Christian proclivity toward traveling and hosting might have rivaled writing and reading as a defining praxis among early Christians.[16] What Lieu and others note about Christians' scribal practices also relates to their travel habits. Travel for early Christians became a symbol of connection, agency, and belief. This powerful symbol emerged from new social patterns and an established network formed through travel events. Travel had the function of *dis*locating people from one social network and *re*locating them into another. Travel, even more than epistles, symbolized distant social connections and so could sustain and stimulate reciprocal ties. The effective power of travel lay in its ability to produce and enhance social relationships across space. Mobility allowed Christians to be physically present with one another and exchange oral teachings, personal updates, financial resources, and letters or manuscripts. The non-discursive practice of travel shaped early Christianity. Similar to the production of texts, the physical movement of Christians created social patterns and

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[13] Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church*; Larry W. Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts: Manuscripts and Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006); Brian J. Wright, *Communal Reading in the Time of Jesus: A Window into Early Christian Reading Practices* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 2017).

[14] Kim Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians of Letters: Literacy, Power, and the Transmitters of Early Christian Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Chris Keith, *The Gospel as Manuscript: An Early History of the Jesus Tradition as Material Artifact* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020).

[15] Judith Lieu, "Letters and the Topography of Early Christianity," *NTS* 62, no. 2 (2016): 167–82.

[16] As fruitful as research on early Christian textuality has been, we might consider how modern scholars' own positionality as academic researchers has shaped their understanding of the subject. Scholars discuss early Christianity as a movement of people who author, read, and publish books, akin to modern researchers. However, conversations about textual production and circulation largely omit the travel aspects of textuality, perhaps because modern scholars author and publish their works digitally, unlike ancients who authored and disseminated physical objects. Written correspondences must be situated within the performance of travel because all documents had to be physically conveyed in person. Christians could not have circulated their epistles or books without travel. Material texts were always embedded within a particular travel event and, thus, serve as a historical witness to travel.

performed social identities across space. For this reason, we might speak about the "travel culture" and "travel-ish nature" of early Christians.

Travel also fostered a Christian identity at the local level. Members of a particular community geographical community had to unite when receiving travelers, sending delegates, and interfacing with other Christian communities. In the case of Ignatius, for example, the local Christian community in various cities had to organize and mobilize when sending delegates and money to Ignatius the prisoner or to the reconstituted church in Antioch. Likewise, the church communities in Philadelphia, Smyrna, and Troas had to coordinate among themselves when receiving Ignatius. Such travel-induced events enabled, even compelled, the local communities to gather together and function, and then gain recognition, as "the church of Ephesus," or "the church of Tralles." A comment by the Greek geographer Pausanias illustrates how ancient communities formed a collective identity through travel. He questioned whether Panopeus, a small Phocian settlement in Asia, could rightly be considered a polis without any civic structures, such as an agora or gymnasium. Yet, he concluded, "Nevertheless…they send delegates (συνέδρους) to the assembly of Phocia" (*Hellados Periegesis* 10.4.1). The act of representatives traveling to another community meant that the people of Panopeus comprised a legitimate polis. For Pausanias, sending delegates to another community was the political act that created a communal identity in relation to other groups. A similar dynamic appears to be present among the early Christians. Travel among early Christians forged collective identities within and between the communities.

In addition to constructing a regional and local "Christian" identity, acts of travel fashioned new dyadic social roles. Travel disrupts established relations and creates new patterns of social interaction. In travel situations, people assume a certain social role and its corresponding behavior. In the travel events discussed herein, Christian travelers and their supporting communities functioned in a variety of social roles: guest and host (Paul and Galatians), visitors and πρόξενοι (Paul's associates and Philemon), departed slave and *amicus domini* (Onesimus and Paul), itinerant and supporter (Onesimus and Philemon), convict and supporter (Ignatius and visiting churches), and ambassador and receiver (Asian churches and Antioch). Travel fostered new roles and expectations for Christians, allowing them to be certain people in those relational contexts. The social roles formed through travel cultivated

relations among Christians of different locales, creating personal points of connection with the broader network of people with a common association with Christ.

Physical movement provided the logistical means by which Christians connected across space. But as the movement expanded and travel became regular, the praxis of travel became a figurative symbol through which Christians articulated their identity. Because of limited space, I identity only three examples in which travel functioned as an early Christian symbol, leaving this topic as a potential avenue for future research. One, travel shaped the group's self-designations; Christians came to be known as ἡ ὁδός, "the way" or "the journey."[17] Members of the group "follow" Jesus and are "sojourners"—people defined by a particular type of (spiritual) movement. Two, travel affected how early Christians narrated their own history. Movement is prominent in Pauline travelogues (Rom 15:22–29; Gal 1:11–2:10; 2 Cor 11:21–33) and the earliest historical narratives (i.e., Acts and apocryphal acts), seemingly as a means for establishing apostolic legitimacy. Three, in the earliest Christian epitaphs (i.e., Abercius of Hieropolis[18] and Julianus of Lyon,[19] both ca. 200 CE), the deceased boast about their travels to craft their own legacy. While early Christians might have adopted travel as a dynamic social symbol from surrounding textual traditions and religious communities, physical mobility seems to have played a vital role in the development of travel as an important symbol in the community.

§9.3 Theological Convictions: Travel and the New Honor Code

The ancient traveler was forced to negotiate and curate their membership, identity, and role within a particular community. Therefore, the meaning of travel often relates to social

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[17] Acts 9:2; 24:14; cf. Luke 9:51; 24:32–35. On the social function of this term for early Christians, see Paul R. Trebilco, *Self-Designations and Group Identity in the New Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 247–71.

[18] IGR IV 696. *Ed. pr.*, W. M. Ramsay, "The Cities and Bishoprics of Phrygia," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 4 (1883): 424–27; for text, commentary, and bibliography, see Margaret M. Mitchell, "Looking for Abercius: Reimagining Contexts of Interpretation of the 'Earliest Christian Inscription,'" in *Commemorating the Dead: Texts and Artifacts in Context*, ed. Laurie Brink and Deborah Green (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007), 303–36; Peter Thonemann, "Abercius of Hierapolis: Christianization and Social Memory in Late Antique Asia Minor," in *Historical and Religious Memory in the Ancient World*, ed. Beate Dignas and R. R. R. Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[19] *Ed. pr.*, J. Pouilloux, "Un nouvelle inscription grecque a Lyon," *JSav*, 1975, 58–75; cf. Horsley, *New Docs*, 1:68–69; for an alternative dating and interpretation, see C. P. Jones, "A Syrian in Lyon," *The American Journal of Philology* 99, no. 3 (1978): 336–53.

identity and communal status. On what basis would travel be considered worthy of welcome and assistance? As an upstart and marginalized group, early Christians formulated a new, in-group honor code. Travel, along with corresponding acts of hospitality, performed their alternative notions of social worth and actualized Christians' new theological vision for humanity. Honor dynamics appear throughout the travel events among early Christians.

Paul traveled through Galatia physically disfigured from the opposition he experienced. Yet, some communities of Galatia did not scorn or dishonor him. They welcomed him as a divine figure worthy of an honorable reception. The travel event and corresponding hospitality demonstrated the Galatians' deliverance from destructive patterns of honor-competition and entry into the "new creation" (Gal 6:15) with its new, cruciform standards for honor-granting.

Even before becoming a Christian, Onesimus traveled to Paul with the expectation that Paul, while a prisoner, possessed authority among Christians to resolve conflicts. Even someone outside the community recognized the unconventional status that Christians afforded to a prisoner. Onesimus' departure to Paul reveals early Christian social values and standards of worth.

Paul's request that Philemon welcome Onesimus required him to accept a new Christian status for Onesimus. The person returning to his house was no longer his former slave but a capable participant in the gospel ministry worthy of welcome. Social interactions were to perform the conviction that, because of Jesus' life and death, Onesimus was to be fundamentally regarded "no longer as slave" but as a "brother." Philemon's response to Onesimus' arrival, and to Paul's subsequent visit, would expose the degree to which he accepted Christians' new rubrics for human worth.

The travel of church delegates to Ignatius in Smyrna reflected a new Christian honor code. Although the loss of status was a typical consequence of visiting prisoners, Christians from various churches nevertheless proceeded to associate with the convict. They refused to accept Rome's judgment of Ignatius as a criminal worthy of death. Instead, they esteemed him as a living martyr. Ignatius deliberately commended them for this and pronounced divine honor upon the delegates who traveled from the churches.

The churches' ambassadorial travel to Antioch, like their visit to Ignatius, was a deliberate and public conferral of honor. Travel declared that former persecutees were worthy of association. Through the embassies from Asia, the Christians marginalized in Antioch received recognition from people in distant cities. Ignatius affirms this honor code in describing how the travel embassy would enhance the honor of all involved parties. The travel event generated honor according to the cruciform social values of early Christians.

Christians' new honor code, rooted in Christ's self-giving death, became apparent through travel events. When a fellow believer was socially dislocated through travel or demeaned through persecution, Christians would intentionally welcome that person and, thus, socially relocate them in the community. Therefore, physical movement became a means by which early Christians expressed their theological convictions regarding human worth in Christ.

Travel, the act of physical movement across space, when located within a sacred realm, carries significance beyond the mundane. For early Christians, travel was more than a pragmatic and utilitarian action for transporting an object or one's body; it was a means of expressing ideology. Movement between Christian communities signified a new cosmic reality and way of life. Travel assumed sacred dimensions and reflected theological convictions, not in the sense of late-antique pilgrimage to a holy relic or revered site, but as a communal act performed within the scope of God's cruciform purposes for his people who were separated across space but united in faith.

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