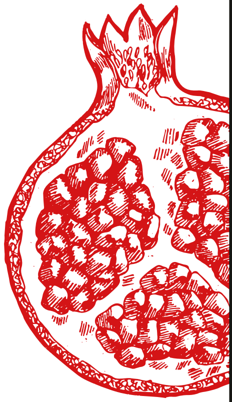
Vol 3, no. 3 December 2023



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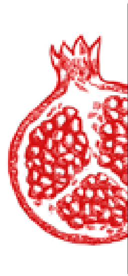

A MULTICULTURAL PAUL IN THE GLOBALIZED ROMAN EMPIRE

Nina Nikki

Source: *Advances in Ancient, Biblical, and Near Eastern Research* 3, no. 3 (December, 2023): 99–136

URL to this article: DOI: 10.35068/aabner.v3i3.1102

Keywords: early Christianity, globalization, multiculturalism, Paul the Apostle, social identity

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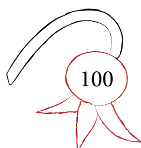
Abstract

This article looks at Paul as a multicultural individual in the globalized Roman Empire. Following theorists such as Verónica Benet-Martínez, Ying-yi Hong, Mark Khei, and Seth Schwartz, multiculturalism is defined here as a person's access to more than one knowledge system. The mutual adjustment of these systems, acculturation, is understood as a group phenomenon sensitive to minority and majority positions, often taking place on the abstract level of identity discourse and accessible through the concept of social identity. The article argues that while Jewishness represents for Paul a robust heritage culture, it does not rule out Paul's access to other cultural knowledge systems. Paul sometimes distances himself from his Jewish identity in favor of an identity "in Christ," which Paul portrays as a knowledge system, even though this system was not very developed. At times, Paul also identifies with Romanness (*Romanitas*), signs of which are scarce but potentially visible in his stereotypical criticism of Jews. The article argues that anti-imperial readings of Paul are exegetically one-sided and need reassessment in the light of the new theoretical developments in the study of the Roman Empire as a globalized environment that is not best understood through dichotomies.

Cet article s'intéresse à Paul comme personne multiculturelle dans l'Empire romain mondialisé. En reprenant les approches de Verónica Benet-Martínez, Ying-yi Hong, Mark Khei et Seth Schwartz, le multiculturalisme est défini ici comme l'accès d'un individu à plus d'un système de connaissances. L'ajustement mutuel de ces systèmes, l'acculturation, est compris comme un phénomène de groupe adaptable aux positions de la minorité et de la majorité, phénomène qui se produit souvent au niveau abstrait du discours sur l'identité et qui est accessible par le biais du concept d'identité sociale. Cette contribution explique que, si la judéité représente pour Paul une culture patrimoniale solide, elle n'exclut pas l'accès de Paul à d'autres systèmes culturels de connaissances. Paul peut se distancier de son identité juive en faveur d'une identité « en Christ », qu'il présente comme un système de connaissances, même si ce système n'est pas très développé. Parfois, Paul s'identifie également à la romanité (*Romanitas*), dont les signes, bien que rares, peuvent potentiellement se donner à voir dans sa critique stéréotypée des Juifs. L'article soutient que les interprétations anti-impériales de Paul sont unilatérales d'un point de vue exégétique et doivent être réévaluées à la lumière de nouveaux développements théoriques dans l'étude de l'Empire romain en tant qu'environnement mondialisé, qui ne s'explique pas au mieux par des dichotomies.



ISSN 2748-6419

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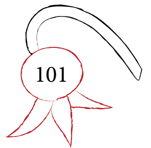
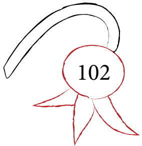


Introduction

This article looks at Paul as a multicultural individual in the Roman Empire and pays special attention to his alleged criticism of the Empire, which is a rising trend in Pauline scholarship. The article begins with a brief overview of how recent studies of the Roman Empire have progressed from the so-called "Romanization paradigm" to viewing Rome from the perspective of globalization—a move that complicates simple anti- or pro-imperial readings of Paul and clears room for viewing him as a multicultural person. Next, the article lays out a theoretical framework for discussing multicultural identity through the social identity approach. Following theorists such as Verónica Benet-Martínez, Ying-yi Hong, Mark Khei, and Seth Schwartz, it defines multiculturalism as a person's access to more than one knowledge system. It understands the mutual adjustment of these systems, acculturation, as a group phenomenon sensitive to minority and majority positions, often taking place on the abstract level of identity discourse. Taking his robust Jewishness as a

starting point, it discusses Paul's multiple knowledge systems and their dynamics, arguing that Paul's Jewishness does not rule out his access to other cultural knowledge systems, even though they can be challenging to detect. Paul sometimes distances himself from his Jewish identity aggressively, but such actions reveal the vital role it played in his life. At times, the distancing is done in favor of an identity "in Christ," which Paul portrays as a knowledge system, even though this system was not highly developed. The last section of the article discusses Paul's identification with Romanness (*Romanitas*), signs of which are scarce but potentially visible in his stereotypical criticism of Jews. Finally, the article suggests that anti-imperial readings of Paul are exegetically dubious and need reassessment in the light of the new theoretical developments in the study of the Roman Empire.



From Romanization to Globalization

The Roman Empire forms a central historical context for studying Paul and his cultural identifications. For a long time, research on the Empire was handicapped by a one-sided interest in the role of the state[1] and the economy,[2] adherence to provincial divisions,[3] and a dichotomy between center and periphery (or Italy and the provinces), as well as a simplistic distinction between native and Roman. The much debated

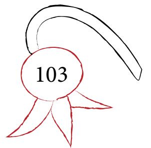
[1] Pieterse (2015, 234) notes that the state-centric view is boosted by the fact that archeological data tends toward monuments ("monumental bias"). According to Mattingly (2011, 16), many views of Rome are "metrocentric," that is, they explain the expansion of Rome as motivated by the greed and power lust of the metropolitan centers (rather than as a reaction to happenings in the periphery). The distinction between metrocentric, pericentric, and systemic explanations comes from Doyle 1986.

[2] Especially the so-called "world systems" approach begun by Immanuel Wallerstein's *The Modern World System* (1974–1989); see Pitts and Versluys 2014, 13.

[3] Martin Pitts and Miguel Versluys link together "Area Studies" and a "methodological nationalism" that dominated historical and archeological studies from the birth of the nation-state in the nineteenth century (2014, 7, 22).

and criticized concept of Romanization is closely linked to these issues.[4] This paradigm views the power of Rome mainly as bringing civilization to backward people—especially in the Roman West (Erskine 2010, 58), with Roman civilization offered as a reward for compliance (Mattingly 2011, 38). According to David Mattingly, this "false paradigm … still haunts us today" (2011, 22).

Recent research has suggested that the Roman Empire in particular, and Greco-Roman society in general, should rather be viewed from the perspective of postcolonialism or globalization.[5] The two perspectives are related and indebted to each other,[6] but the former has also been criticized for bolstering a dichotomy between native and Roman.[7] Globalization is commonly understood to denote various forms of "connectivity and de-territorialisation" (Pitts and Versluys 2014, 11), a "trend of growing worldwide interconnectedness" (Pieterse 2015, 235), and even the idea of limitlessness, which chimes well with Virgil's idea of Rome as *imperium sine fine* (*Aeneid* 1.278–79).[8] While the term "globalization" was invented to describe a modern situation, a growing number of scholars believe that the phenomenon itself is not restricted to modernity (Pitts and Versluys 2014, 17, 21). According to Jan Nederveen Pieterse, widening the perspective of globalization to include the Roman Empire is helpful for both historical research and globalization studies. Viewing globalization from a deep, historical perspective helps to dismantle presentist and Eurocenteric views on



[4] Pitts and Versluys 2014, 5–6, 21–22. Mattingly summarizes the problems, among others the fact that the concept "implies that cultural change was unilateral and unilinear (with the flow from advanced civilization to less advanced communities)" and "de-emphasizes elements suggesting continuing traditions of indigenous society" (2011, 38–39). Andrew Gardner emphasizes the fact the concept reflects the modern imperial context of its adoption into scholarly discourse (2013, 2).

[5] A major change toward a globalization perspective took place with A. G. Hopkins's 2002 volume *Globalization in World History*.

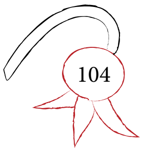
[6] On the relationship between the perspectives, see Gikandi 2000.

[7] Gardner 2013, 4. For postcolonialist perspectives in general, see the "Introduction" to this special issue; for those on Paul, see the section *A Roman or Anti-Imperial Paul?* below.

[8] See Mattingly 2011, 15.

world history. Globalization perspectives also complement the way Roman cultural and archeological studies have for a long time already recognized "mobility, connectivity and mélange" in the Roman world (Pieterse 2015, 226–365).

The perspective of globalization deconstructs dichotomies by stressing the plurality of identity, interconnectedness between different areas and people, a multicentric perspective,[9] networks, and the importance of cultural transmission alongside the economy and politics.[10] As for the interest in the state, Pieterse summarizes the difference: "In state-centric accounts it is structures and institutions that unify the Mediterranean world, while in globalisation perspectives connectivity, mobility, objects, and knowledge networks do" (2015, 229).[11] In addition to these, and importantly for the following discussion on Paul, Greco-Roman culture represents subjective cosmopolitanism and a world consciousness.[12]



The Roman Empire and Roman culture were thus inherently pluralistic. This means that Romanness (or *Romanitas*) denotes multiple cultural influences, and the inhabitants of the Roman Empire represented multiple identities. According to Pieterse, "the trope of multiple identities and 'multiple sources of the self' that is often viewed as characteristic of postmodern times, we find in antiquity as well" (2015, 232). Pieterse uses Herod the Great as an example. He was the king of Judea, a Jew, and an Idumean by birth, but he was also a Roman who

[9] "Roman culture was an artifact of the provinces as much as it was of the metropolitan center" (Mattingly 2011, 40).

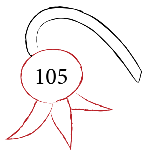
[10] It has been emphasized that cultural globalization does not denote homogenization but rather the variation created by incorporation of global trends into local cultures (Pitts and Versluys 2014, 14).

[11] Similarly, Erskine (2010, 61): "Rather than simple imitation or even two-way traffic as subjects influence Rome in turn, it may be that influence goes in many different directions, following lines of communication between provinces and around the Mediterranean. In this we might see a parallel with the empire's road system, in which the roads, in contrast to many other empires, not only radiated out from the centre but also connected its various parts."

[12] Beautifully illustrated by Polybius (*Histories* 1.3), who claims the world became interconnected in an unprecedented way after the Second Punic War (taken up by Pitts and Versluys 2014, 18). See also Pieterse 2015, 231.

received a Greek education (2015, 232). David Mattingly joins those who criticize the top-down understanding of influences and the homogenizing effect of the Romanization paradigm, claiming that the model of "singular identity affiliation" both in terms of ethnicity and social identity in general is the product of modern nationalism (2011, 206–7, 214). Mattingly believes that both individual and group identities were in Roman times complex and dynamic, and that instead of a one-directional, once experienced Romanization, there were "multiple attempts at defining and redefining identity" (2011, 213–14). In the following section, I will combine this historical background with the study of multicultural identity in order to form a more comprehensive framework for investigating Paul's multicultural identifications.

Multiculturalism, Acculturation, and the Social Identity Approach

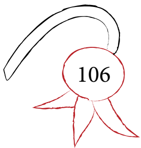


Verónica Benet-Martínez and Ying-yi Hong explain the topicality of the 2014 *Oxford Handbook of Multicultural Identity* by stating that "more people from different cultural backgrounds are connecting together, and at the same time, more people are being exposed to multiple cultures." The editors see today's world as culturally varied and note that multicultural experiences have become common in peoples' lives. Cases of cultural conflicts and blending alike, they claim, make it particularly important to understand how national, cultural, ethnic, and racial group memberships are developed and experienced (2014, 1–3). As we saw above, historians have identified a cultural diversity similar to that which Benet-Martínez and Hong attribute to modern society in the globalized Roman Empire as well.

The term "multiculturalism" can mean two things: first, it refers to a political stance toward different cultural groups,[13] and second, it denotes individuals with more than one cultural affiliation. The latter is

[13] The term entered common parlance in the 1980s–1990s when acculturation shifted from the assimilation-centered "melting pot" metaphor to a "salad bowl" ideology (Schwartz et al. 2014, 59).

the focus of Ying-yi Hong and Michael Khei's 2014 article "Dynamic Multiculturalism: The Interplay of Socio-Cognitive, Neural, and Genetic Mechanisms." It is also of special interest for this article, where the person of Paul is the focus. Hong and Khei (2014, 13) follow Fredrik Barth (2002) in defining culture as a knowledge system, where norms, beliefs, and practices are shared by a group of individuals tied to each other by race, ethnicity, nationality, or in some other way. The idea of shared cultural knowledge systems breaks with the essentialist understanding of cultures by positing that "the link between shared cultural knowledge and a certain (racial, ethnic, religious, gender) group is probabilistic and should not be conceptualized as a deep core essence of the group" (Hong and Khei 2014, 15).[14] Multicultural individuals, on the other hand, are defined loosely as people having a multiracial background, immigrant or residential status in another country, or simply exposure to more than one cultural tradition (2014, 12). From these definitions, it follows that multiculturalism denotes access to more than one knowledge system (2014, 16).



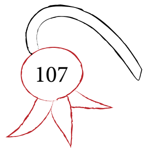
Acculturation denotes the adjustments that individuals with different heritage cultures make in order to receive another culture. For a long time, acculturation models were unidimensional and stressed assimilation to the receiving culture and rejection of the heritage culture as the ideal situation.[15] Today, however, the models tend to be bidimensional/bicultural, meaning that they stress *integration*—desiring contact with the receiving culture while retaining one's heritage culture—as the most adaptive model (Schwartz et al. 2014, 59). Research has also advanced from studying solely the behavior of individuals to understanding how multiculturalism manifests itself in different domains: practices, values, and identifications (Schwartz et al. 2014, 61). While acculturation processes have traditionally been viewed from the perspective of individuals, intergroup processes have recently been emphasized. Seth Schwartz

[14] "Because the core of culture—shared cultural knowledge system—is not a core essence, it is possible for individuals to acquire and internalize multiple shared cultural knowledge systems associated with multiple groups" (Hong and Khei 2014, 16).

[15] A view represented by Gordon 1964, for example.

et al. in fact stress that acculturation situations are always intergroup situations and seek to bring new light to these relations through the social identity approach (2014, 58). They discuss how both majority and minority groups react in situations of perceived identity threats (2014, 67–85). Threats to identity are understood as different from realistic threats, such as competition for jobs, housing, or other material resources. They are threats to an individual's or a group's "feelings of self-esteem, continuity, distinctiveness, meaning, belonging, and efficacy" (2014, 74).

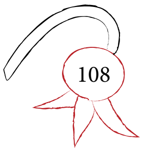
From the perspective of the majority group, Schwartz et al. posit that minorities can be viewed as posing a threat to the majority group's core beliefs and values (2014, 68). They note that intercultural situations do not always follow the prediction of the social identity approach that similar groups feel most threatened by each other. According to this prediction, dissimilar minority groups could even be understood as affirming the positive distinctiveness of the majority group. Studies have shown, however, that majority group members feel especially threatened by groups that are different from their own, which leads to demands for assimilation. Schwartz et al. explain this phenomenon through a perceived common national identity – and especially the motivation to protect its continuity – which results in viewing minority group members as "black sheep" within the national community (2014, 69–79). An essentialist understanding of national identity and a strong identification with it ("high identifiers") have been shown to enhance prejudice (2014, 71–72).



Minority groups are often disadvantaged both materially (realistic threat) as well as symbolically (identity threat). Individuals may attempt to improve their status by shifting to the majority group. These "individual mobility" measures are not, however, available to everyone. While visible minority groups (such as Hispanics or Asians in the current United States) will be viewed as "perpetual foreigners," others may be able to break the boundaries and assimilate (e.g., "passing as white"). Demands to assimilate can, however, lead to counterreactions, where minority groups heighten identification with their group ("reactive ethnicity")—which has been proven to produce enhanced well-being within the group (Schwartz et al. 2014, 75–77). The role of leaders as

entrepreneurs of identity is significant here for both minority and majority groups, as they can mobilize both opinions and actions.[16]

When individual mobility is impossible, the disadvantaged groups are more likely to engage in group-based strategies, such as social creativity or social competition measures. The first denotes the various means by which the lower status group ensures a sense of positive distinctiveness and continuity despite its inability to actually challenge the higher status group. The group can, for example, compare itself to other groups that are even lower in status in order to feel positive about itself, or isolate itself from other groups into enclaves in order to avoid comparison altogether. Social competition, on the other hand, tends to be more difficult, although examples of collective action that have led to an improvement in social status can be named from modern as well as ancient times (Schwartz et al. 2014, 76–77). Bicultural integration—that is, maintaining the heritage culture while adopting the receiving culture—is today considered the ideal type of acculturation. However, this state can be challenging to achieve for two reasons. First, the majority group may not accept the minority group member ("perpetual foreigner syndrome"). Second, a separatist minority group may look at the integrating individual as a deviant or traitor who undermines the heritage group's distinctive identity (Schwartz 2014, 78).

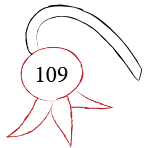


Since culture is a knowledge system and the multicultural individual acquires and navigates through more than one system, it becomes important to understand how the cultural shifts take place. Hong and Khei posit a mechanism of cultural *frame switching* where different internalized cultural knowledge systems activate depending on the contexts, bringing forth different—even conflicting—affects, thoughts, and behaviors. The available knowledge systems are activated through *priming*, that is, through "prompting the culture imperceptibly by exposing individuals to the respective cultural icons." System activation is not automatic, but dependent on the applicability of the framework in a

[16] "Just as leaders within the majority community may attempt to sway public opinion by portraying migrants as a threat to the larger society, leaders within the migrant community may also seek to gain favorable social position by portraying the majority ethnic group as the enemy" (Schwartz et al. 2014, 77).

given situation. The existence of an intergroup dimension in a situation facilitates activation (Hong and Khei 2014, 17–18).

Hong and Khei do not only discuss this cognitive aspect of multiculturalism, they also take up what they call the "multicultural self," which for them denotes the different emotional aspects of the multicultural experience. A significant question has to do with the felt (in)security of one's place in the given culture. According to Hong and Khei,[17] the situation is analogous to parent–child attachment, in that a person can be either securely or insecurely attached to a culture. Studies have shown that the attachment of immigrants to their host cultures can be particularly challenging. Attachment security affects the individual's ability to cope with stress, and insecure attachment is linked to discrimination and reduced well-being (2014, 24). Another factor that has been proven to affect the well-being of individuals with multicultural identity can be analyzed with the help of Verónica Benet-Martínez and Jana Haritatos's (2005) model of *bicultural identity integration*. The model measures the experienced blendedness and harmony between the different identities. Felt harmony between the two (or more) cultural streams has been linked to easier and more purposeful cultural frame-switching as well as higher self-esteem and well-being (see Schwartz et al. 2014, 79–80).



The Complexity of Paul's Heritage Identity as a Jew

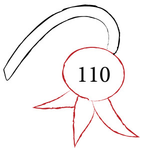
We turn now to discuss Paul's identity as a Jew and as a non-Jew. This starting point can, however, already be problematized, as there is extensive discussion on what exactly constituted Jewishness at the turn of the Common Era. The last half-century of scholarship has witnessed a lively debate about the nature of Second Temple Judaism (or Judaisms),[18] inspired, for example, by such newly discovered sources as the Dead Sea Scrolls. The question of correct terminology has also been visited lately. Many have suggested that we should not speak of "Jews" in this

[17] Drawing on Hong et al. 2006.

[18] For an overview of recent changes and advancements in the study of Judaism in the Hellenistic and early Roman periods, see Jokiranta et al. 2017.

time period but rather use the term "Judeans," which emphasizes the role of ethnicity.[19] These discussions cannot be tackled here in full, but hopefully the arguments below will contribute to them in a fruitful way. Also, this article does not advance from a strict definition of what constitutes Judaism and where the boundaries of Judaism lay in the first centuries CE. Paul is, I argue, a good example of why such boundaries are impossible to delineate precisely.

With Paul as a Jew, I focus particularly on his post-calling life, as there is no real debate on Paul's Jewish upbringing and background: Paul discusses these plainly on several occasions (Gal 2:15; 2 Cor 11:22; Phil 3:4–6; Rom 9:3, 11:1). Judaism is clearly Paul's heritage culture. While it is intuitive to consider this identity as immutable and irreversible,[20] scholars have vigorously debated the extent and nature of Paul's Jewishness during his life as a Christ-follower (Ehrensperger 2013, 116). While older scholarship tended to see a discontinuity between Judaism and Christianity already in Paul's time, the emphasis has in recent years shifted toward a continued, strong Jewish self-identification by Paul. At its most extreme, this has sometimes been coupled with attributing to Paul a soteriology that allows Jews to be saved as Jews, with Christ being the savior of the gentiles only.[21] It is not within the scope of the current



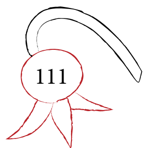
[19] See Mason 2007; Esler 2003; Holmberg 2008; Reinhartz 2014 for further discussion on the terms "Jew," "Jewish," and "Judean." Johnson Hodge (2007, 15) states the need for a singular term which is "multivalent, complex, context-dependent and it should include various facets of self-understanding: religious practices, geographic homeland, shared history, ethical codes, common ancestry, stories of origin, theological positions." She opts for the transliteration *Ioudaioi*, since no such term is available.

[20] Johnson Hodge 2007, 57: "Although ethnic boundaries can be crossed in some ways, the Jewish identity of Paul and his colleagues is a 'natural' one. I doubt Paul considered his birth as a Jew mutable."

[21] For example, Gaston 1987, 32: "The Gentile counterpart to living in the covenant community of Torah is being 'in Christ.'" This is a "covenant and commandment relationship to God which is different from but parallel to that of Sinai." Gaston believes that Paul was falsely accused of teaching Jews to give up parts of the law, although suspicions of doing so were the reason he was opposed by some Jews. Similarly, Gager 2000, 59: "Paul never speaks of Israel's ultimate redemption

article to repeat this gargantuan discussion in full.[22] My aim is simply to demonstrate the continued robustness of Paul's Jewish identity and look for instances where other cultural identifications or knowledge systems surface—making Paul's identity bi- or multicultural.

I will do the first part largely in critical discussion with Caroline Johnson Hodge's work *If Sons, Then Heirs* (2007), whose emphasis on the role of ethnicity is relevant to the current argument. The discussion of Paul's Jewishness sets the stage for investigating the other aspects of Paul's multicultural identity. I argue that, despite the dominant role of his Jewishness, Paul at times distances himself from it in an act of *cultural frame-switching*. In 1 Corinthians 9:21, for example, Paul famously claims that he can identify with non-Jews: he "became as one outside the law" to "those outside the law." The next chapter will therefore focus on what we can find out about Paul's other cultural identifications: What knowledge systems besides Judaism did Paul have access to? How did these knowledge systems inform Paul's multicultural identity? Finally, I briefly discuss the possibility of viewing the social identification of "being in Christ" as a cultural knowledge system in the making.



According to Johnson Hodge, Pauline scholarship has long viewed Paul's soteriological ideas from a universalistic perspective and downplayed the role of ethnicity in his thinking.[23] It has been claimed that Paul offered a *universal religion* to all who followed Christ regardless of their ethnicity, thus representing a corrective to Jewish ethnic particularity. Johnson Hodge claims that "both traditional and new perspective interpretations of Paul tend to downplay Paul's ethnic language, to mask it as something else, or to juxtapose ethnic particularity with a universal faith in Christ" (2007, 44). The universalist approach has

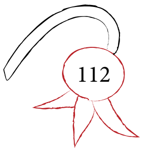
as a conversion to Christ." There are "two paths to salvation–through Christ for Gentiles, through the Law for Israel." Gager, however, emphasizes that finally the two become one people of God, which is "not identical with Israel and certainly not with any Christian church" (2000, 61).

[22] See, e.g., Ehrensperger 2013, 118f. on central points of contest. A good overview up until a decade ago is offered by Zetterholm 2009.

[23] The universalist stance is also criticized by Campbell (2008) and Tucker (2010, 2011). See Nikki 2021 for a critical evaluation of their arguments.

also led to juxtaposing "ethnically neutral 'gentile Christians' with ethnically specific 'Jewish Christians'" in early Christ-following communities (2007, 47).

Johnson Hodge counters these ideas, claiming that Paul never gave up ethnic particularity in favor of a universalist outlook, but rather kept arguing from a markedly Jewish ethnic and kinship perspective. For Johnson Hodge's Paul, "gentiles are alienated from the God of Israel. And it is in these terms that Paul presents the solution: baptism into Christ makes gentiles descendants of Abraham" (2007, 4). For this Paul, gentiles are "the ethnic and religious 'other'" for whom Paul makes room in the story of Israel through kinship creation. Importantly, in her view Paul does not conflate Christ-following gentiles and Jews into one group: "Gentiles-in-Christ and Jews are separate but related lineages of Abraham" (2007, 5). Declining the universalist, non-ethnic option is essential for the assumption by Johnson Hodge and other representatives of the "Paul within Judaism/radical new perspective," according to which Jews (and to some extent gentiles) did not, in Paul's view, need to change or give up their ethnic identity in order to be saved (2007, 8–9). Following the terminology of multiculturalism studies, it may be said that Johnson Hodge and colleagues do not wish to take Paul as promoting cultural assimilation but rather something akin to bicultural integration.



It is easy to agree with Johnson Hodge that it is much due to Paul that later Christians also adhere to "the story of this particular ethnic people, the God of their homeland, their myths about creation and the ordering of the cosmos, and the morals inscribed in their sacred scripture" (2007, 4).[24] According to Johnson Hodge, Paul's Jewishness is also clear from the way Paul sees the world as divided into Jews[25] and gentiles/

[24] Similarly, Ehrensperger 2013, 132: "He asserts his Jewish identity again and again, and the symbolic and social universe he is embedded in, and within which he operates, is primarily Jewish."

[25] Ehrensperger notes that with his use of the term *genos* (of the Jews), Paul implies "special bonds between those who are part of this *genos* in terms of shared origin, and descent, that is, kinship ties" (2013, 117).

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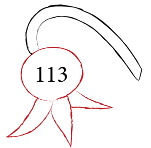
Greeks (*ethnē*/*Hellēnes*):[26] "The term *ethne* stands not for a particular people per se, but a whole conglomerate of those who are not *Ioudaioi*" and clearly "makes sense only in an ethnically specific Jewish context" (2007, 47). The Jewish ingroup is viewed with more specificity than the outgroups, which are thus conflated into a single, faceless crowd.[27] Paul never speaks of the specific ancestries or customs of the gentiles but continually treats them as one non-Jewish group and relates their past through the lens of the highly denigrative genealogical account in Genesis (Rom 1:18–32) (Johnson Hodge 2007, 50–51).[28] This is well in line with the social identity approach's "ingroup heterogeneity/outgroup homogeneity" prediction (Judd et al. 1991).

In addition to *ethnē*, Paul also uses the term "Greek" of non-Jews, especially when pairing "Jew" with another term (e.g., Rom 1:16; 1 Cor 1:22–24). Johnson Hodge (2007) offers several explanations for Paul's occasional use of "Greek" instead of "gentile." For her, the term may reveal Paul's (inadvertent) participation in the hegemony of Greek culture in the Roman East, as it may metonymically describe all non-Jews. The choice may also reflect Paul's awareness of the self-identification of (some of) his audience as Greeks (no-one self-identified as a "gentile"). Certainly, Paul at least expected them to know the Greek language (2007, 59–60). It is worth mentioning that Paul's ingroup viewpoint slants his worldview toward a juxtaposition of Jews with a much larger and more powerful outgroup—as if the two were equal.[29]



[26] *Akrobustia* ("foreskin") is also used of non-Jews; see Johnson Hodge 2007, 60–64; Ehrensperger 2013, 121.

[27] Ehrensperger 2013, 106–7, similarly to Johnson Hodge 2007.

[28] Johnson Hodge 2007, 50–51. Ehrensperger (2013, 122) reminds us that *ethnē* is plural and that Romans in using this term showed their awareness of diversity in the subject peoples. She suggests that we should not rule out similar awareness by Paul despite the absence of evidence. Ehrensperger notes that Paul knows at times to differentiate between Greeks and barbarians and mentions the various locations he sends letters to. To my mind, these mentions are still quite stereotypical and superficial.

[29] Ehrensperger 2013, 116: "The centre of [Paul's world] is neither Rome nor Athens, but Jerusalem (Rom 15.16)."

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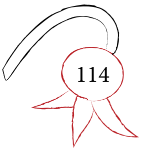
Paul uses the word *ethnē* of those non-Jews who do not follow Christ (1 Cor 5:1, 12:2; 1 Thess 4:3–5), but also of those who do (Rom 1:5–6; 11:13). This speaks in favor of a distinction between Jewish and non-Jewish groups *among Christ-believers*. The division in Paul's heritage culture into insiders (Jews) and outsiders (everyone else) thus persists. A good example is found in Paul's words to Peter in Galatians 2:14–15, where he clearly distinguishes a group of Christ-believers, including himself and Peter (2:14, *Ioudaios hyparchōn*), as Jewish "by origin/birth/nature"—in distinction to those who are not (2:15, *hēmeis fysei Ioudaioi kai ouk ex ethnōn hamartōloi*, "We ourselves are Jews by birth and not gentile sinners", NRSV).

It has been suggested by, for example, J. Brian Tucker and William S. Campbell that Paul not only retained Jewish particularity in Christ, but also to some extent a gentile particularity as well. Tucker and Campbell claim that Paul believed in "the retention of one's particularity in Christ, whether Jew or Gentile" (Campbell 2008, 156) and considered "diversity … a central value" (Tucker 2010, 66). The way in which Paul identifies some Christ-believers as gentiles, however, only repeats Paul's Jewish emic and stereotypical view of a humanity divided into Jews and non-Jews and allows very little nuance to the various heritage cultures of the gentiles, who certainly had many existing ethnic, kinship, and other ties. Johnson Hodge's suggestion is that for Paul the gentiles become, through Abrahamic kinship, subsumed into the Jewish narrative and offered a new past and history in replacement of their particular background, leaving little diversity for gentiles, who, as she states, "must give up their gods and religious practices in order to proclaim loyalty of the God of Israel" and "accept Israel's messiah, scriptures, stories of origin, ethical standards, and even ancestry" (2007, 131).[30] The readings of Paul as tolerant of existing gentile identities unfortunately ignore, on the one hand, the pressure Paul places on gentile believers to assimilate and, on the other, the extent to which he continuously sees them as "perpetual foreigners."



[30] In fact, despite their explicit claim to the contrary, Campbell and Tucker also end up stressing various changes that Paul insists on for gentile converts (see Nikki 2021).

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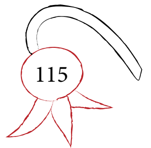
It is clear to modern scholarship that Paul did not cease to be a Jew upon his calling to Christ. His letters do not testify to a clear-cut break with Judaism later in life either. Paul's continued division of people into Jews and gentiles is proof of this. However, the suggestion by Johnson Hodge and others that Paul's Jewishness remained entirely unproblematic, static, and intact for the rest of his life is a simplification. The question is strongly related to whether Judaism at the turn of the Common Era is viewed as an ethnic or a religious system. Shaye Cohen, for example, sees the birth of a culturally and religiously determined *Jewish* identity already in the Maccabean era, alongside a supposedly immutable, ethnic *Judean* identity.[31] Johnson Hodge challenges Cohen's distinction between the two different Jewish identifications, arguing that Judaism at the turn of the Common Era was not a religion but an ethnic/kinship identity. Rightly, however, she views all ethnicities and kinship relations as constructed and mutable (2007, 15–16, 54),[32] which essentially makes

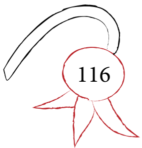


[31] According to Cohen (1999, 109–10), before the second century BCE "'Iudaeanness' was a function of birth and geography," but "in the century following the Hasmonean rebellion two new meanings of 'Iudaeans' emerge: Judaeans are all those, of whatever ethnic or geographic origins, who worship the God whose temple is in Jerusalem (a religious definition), or who have become citizens of the state established by the Judaeans (a political definition)." For Cohen, ethnic identity is immutable, whereas religious and political identifications brought about fluidity in the boundaries between the two.

[32] See the work of Campbell and Tucker, who agree with Johnson Hodge on the question of continued ethnic particularism in Christ but view ethnicity as less constructed (Campbell 2008, 4–5; Tucker 2010, 65, 78; Tucker 2011, 51–57). An important work on the constructed nature of ethnicity in antiquity is Hall 1997. Jonathan Hall criticizes both primordial and instrumentalist views of ethnicity and stresses instead that while "ethnic identity is a cultural construct perpetually renewed and renegotiated through discourse and social praxis" it still needs to be recognized that "the ethnic group does possess its own realm of reality" (1997, 19). Hall considers "a connection with a specific territory and the common myth of descent" to be among the main characteristics that distinguish ethnic groups from other social groups (1997, 25). It is clear for him, however, that "any quest for an objective definition of an ethnic group is doomed to failure simply because the defining criteria of group membership are socially constructed and renegotiated primarily through written and spoken discourse" (1997, 24).

them cultural knowledge systems. Despite this emphasis by Johnson Hodge, it is hard to escape the impression that the idea of Judaism as an ethnic identity is somehow meant in the overall argument to ensure its immutability in Paul. Constructedness is an important requirement for Johnson Hodge's claim that Paul was able to shape a new identity for gentiles as descendants of Abraham. It opens the door, however, for the possibility that Paul's Jewishness was also malleable—even discardable. Johnson Hodge, however, seems unwilling to consider this side of the coin seriously: for her, and for other proponents of the "Paul within Judaism" perspective, Paul's Jewish identity—unlike the gentile Christ-followers' heritage identities—must remain rather static.

The "Other Sides" of Paul

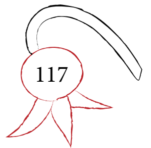


While there is no denying that Paul is continuously indebted to the Jewish symbolic universe (quite diverse in itself), it is worthwhile to try and sift from his letters instances that illustrate his other cultural knowledge systems. This discussion has traditionally centered on juxtaposing Jewish and Hellenistic influences in Paul. Hellenism has been understood as a "fusion (*Verschmelzung*) of Greek and local oriental cultures across the Hellenistic world" (Jokiranta et al. 2017, 4). The concept itself is a modern one, dating from the works of the nineteenth-century German historian J. G. Droysen. It aimed originally at creating a trajectory from Greek civilization to Christianity—with Judaism distanced from the two as degenerate.[33] At a later phase, especially due to Martin Hengel's work, Judaism was understood to participate in the Hellenistic mix. Hengel (1969), however, still viewed the Maccabean Revolt as a counterreaction to Hellenization, which eventually led to a self-segregated Rabbinic Judaism. More recently, the ideas of Hellenism as a fusion of cultures and Judaism as inherently in conflict with Hellenism have fallen under severe criticism. Kathy Ehrensperger,

[33] See Ehrensperger 2007, 20–21. As Ehrensperger puts it: "The role of Judaism in this process is confined to its function in the preparation of Christianity in which the spirit would come to itself" (2007, 23).

for example, stresses that the concept of Hellenism should be replaced with an appreciation of the diversity—not fusion—of cultures and ethnicities in the Greco-Roman world (2013, 26–7).[34]

Ehrensperger discusses biculturalism in Paul as a paradigm for understanding the *translation process* between Paul's fully Jewish identity and other cultures in the Greco-Roman world (2013, 133).[35] The analysis below, however, is informed by the social identity approach and multicultural studies, which allow Paul to engage more deeply in cultural frame-switching between his Jewish knowledge system and the other ones he has to some extent internalized. This, I believe, corresponds better with what Paul himself in 1 Corinthians 9:20–23 claims to be doing when he says: "To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law."[36]



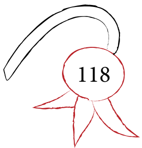
One way to clear space for other identifications is to look at instances where Paul distances himself from central aspects of ethnic Jewishness. First, Johnson Hodge's (2007) view of Paul as constantly arguing through Abrahamic kinship needs to be corrected. It is evident that Paul did not always approach his gentile audience with the offer of Abrahamic ancestry. This reduces Paul's dependence on the Jewish knowledge system on at least some occasions. Johnson Hodge arrives at her solution because she focuses her argument on Paul's letters to the Galatians and Romans. The argumentation in these letters, however, is born out of Paul's encounters with those Christ-followers who promoted Torah observance and circumcision for gentiles and did this on the very premise that the latter created kinship with Abraham. In social identity approach terms, Paul enters into social competition over Abrahamic kinship as a positive identifier and claims it for the gentile

[34] Jokiranta et al. 2017, 5: "More recent studies on the interaction between Jewish and Greco-Roman cultures show greater caution regarding the use of the term 'Hellenism' and more awareness of varieties of cultural interaction." For the history of the term and further criticism, see Jokiranta et al. 2017, 3–5. See also Collins 2005.

[35] For a brief synopsis of Ehrensperger's multicultural (bilingual/multilingual) interpretation of Paul, see also Ehrensperger 2019, 143–46.

[36] See Nikki 2013, 77–81 on the problems of reading this passage as referring to mere mimicry or rhetorical adaptation by Paul.

Christ-followers on the basis of faith alone (Gal 3:6–9). Paul's argument is thus reactive, not constitutive.[37] His letters to the Thessalonian and Philippian believers, on the other hand, bear no mention of Abrahamic kinship and do not convey the impression that the communities' identity rested on it.[38] I have previously suggested that Paul may in these cases have approached the gentile groups with a message more focused on apocalyptic future events (Nikki 2016). Further research should be done to determine whether this, admittedly Jewish, apocalyptic framework resonated more easily with the recipients' previous knowledge systems. Other rationalizations Paul uses to approach gentiles are the notions of election (1 Thess 1:4) and sanctification (1 Thess 3:13; 4:3), which also build on Jewish ideology but may be more understandable and persuasive even outside a Jewish knowledge system.



A degree of distance from some central tenets of Judaism is also found in the instances where Paul treats circumcision either with indifference (e.g., 1 Cor 7:18–19) or outright hostility (Gal 3–4; Phil 3:2–3), speaks of his "earlier life in Judaism" (Gal 1:13–14), denies being currently "under the law," and can speak of becoming "as a Jew" when needed (1 Cor 9:20–21). These examples may be understood as instances of *cultural frame-switching primed by social contexts*.[39] Proponents of the

[37] Paul's argument seems secondary also on the basis that it is quite forced and does not reflect the story of Genesis 17 as well as the alleged claim of the opponents (Nikki 2016, 246–47).

[38] Tucker discusses Johnson Hodge's views on Abrahamic kinship positively but notes that "the way this works in 1 Corinthians is unclear" (2010, 87 n. 121). 1 Corinthians makes no mention of Abraham, and 2 Corinthians mentions him only in 11:22.

[39] There is some difference here to Ehrensperger's theory of Paul's project as cultural translation. Ehrensperger (2013, 4–5) understands translation as a process wider and more profound than language and texts. It is for her highly contextual, a meeting of "universes of discourse." She insists, however, on the absolute primacy and continuity of Paul's Jewish identity. For her, "Paul sees himself as commissioned to transmit a message not only from the divine realm to that of humans but also from the Jewish social and symbolic universe to the world of the nations" (2013, 139). His mission is to deliver a message "from within a Jewish symbolic and social universe into the world of the nations" (2013, 3).

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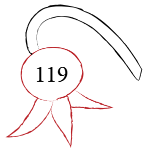
"Paul within Judaism" perspective usually read the these types of passages as addressed to gentile Christ-believers alone and as not involving Paul himself or other Jewish Christ-followers.[40] These readings, however, tend to be strained.[41] I have elsewhere suggested that both the neutral and the hostile passages represent Paul's contextual and flexible social identifications and his attempts to identify as a prototypical leader of the gentile or mixed communities in question.[42] In 1 Corinthians 7 and 9, for example, Paul demonstrates through his own example that the Corinthian believers should also view a Christ-identity as the most salient one and treat both gentile and Jewish identifications as subcategories, thus relativizing their role.[43] I will discuss below to what extent this "Christ-identity" can be viewed as a distinct cultural identification or knowledge system.

In Philippians 3, Paul speaks to a fully gentile audience and seeks to portray himself as its prototypical leader. This impels him to discard his Jewish pedigree in a shocking manner.[44] Paul outright slanders his own past, calling it "dung/excrement" (3:8, *skubalon*). The passage has proven problematic for scholars: some have opted to relativize its harshness by insisting, for example, that it is "a comparative, not an absolute statement" (Ehrensperger 2013, 119); others have claimed it refers only to Paul's specific Jewish identity as a Pharisee (Betz 2015, 55–59). But the first mitigation does not take the harshness of the passage seriously enough and the second is not supported by the text. Paul also goes further than slandering his own past. He derides circumcision (calling it "mutilation," 3:2) and Jewish dietary regulations (calling those who follow them "worshippers of the belly," 3:19). This is not to claim that



[40] This "hermeneutical key" (Zetterholm 2015, 45, 48) is attributed historically to Lloyd Gaston (1987).

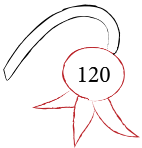
[41] Räisänen 2001, 94: "forced to give many Pauline passages a twisted exegesis"; Räisänen 2010, 258. See also Nikki 2022, 199.

[42] Nikki 2013; Nikki 2019, 170–79. Ehrensperger (2013, 116) claims that a lack of differentiation between Paul's and his followers' identities has led to confusion. At times, Paul does indeed make a distinction between himself and his audience (e.g., Gal 2:14–15). At times, however, he attempts the opposite.

[43] Nikki 2013, 86–87; Nikki 2019, 176–77.

[44] See Nikki 2016, 254.

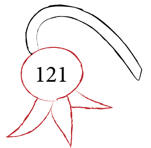
the maneuver was an unproblematic one. For Paul himself, Jewishness represents a *chronic identification.*[45] Members of the Greco-Roman receiving cultures may have viewed Jews—Paul among them—as "perpetual foreigners." Consequently, Paul must resort to *approval-seeking outgroup violation* in order to legitimize this unnatural move (Nikki 2019, 177–78). What motivates Paul's reaction in Philippians 3 (and the same logic goes for Galatians) is a perceived threat to the identity of the gentile Christ-followers.[46] In an expression of outgroup homogeneity (Judd and Park 1988),[47] Paul lumps together those Christ-followers who demand law observance of the gentiles with other Jews. This majority group is then portrayed as threatening the unique identity of the gentile Christ-believers by enticing them to solve their disadvantaged position by moving to the majority group.[48] Paul's response can also be understood as a case of "reactive ethnicity," where the alleged demand of assimilation by Jews / Jewish Christians is countered with heightened boundary-drawing. In a similar situation in Galatians, Paul suggests that individuals who integrate with the majority are deviants or traitors who undermine the distinctive identity of the ingroup (esp. Gal 5). It is important here to remember that identity discourse does not always faithfully reflect historical reality, but more often represents attempts to move it in a desired direction.



[45] See Sherman et al. 1999, 92–93 for the concept of chronic identity, and Hakola 2007, 272–73 for the chronic versus contextual identifications of Second Temple Jewish groups.
[46] In light of the contextuality of social identifications, however, it is not problematic that in 2 Corinthians 11:22 the same pedigree is considered valid and valuable.
[47] In intergroup situations, both the ingroup and outgroup are perceptually homogenized, but the outgroup is more so (Judd and Park 1988). Minorities may view themselves as more homogenous than outgroups (Simon and Brown 1987).
[48] See Esler 1998. The historical position of Paul's "opponents" in Galatians is a famous exegetical puzzle that may never be satisfactorily solved (for my solution, see Nikki 2019, 120–30). The way Paul presents the problem in the letter, however, fits the reactions to perceived identity threats by both majority groups (Jewish / Jewish Christian opponents) and minority groups (Paul's group) as described by Schwartz et al. (2014).

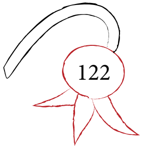
The specific content of the non-Jewish identities of the gentile communities that Paul attempts to identify with is difficult to decipher, as Paul's depictions of non-Jews are consistently stereotypical and reveal little awareness of the local heritage cultures of the addressees.[49] The gentile converts' past is depicted in broad strokes as one of idolatry and ignorance of God (1 Thess 1:9; Gal 4:8), or, as in the case in Philippians, left completely unmentioned (Nikki 2016, 252–53). It remains quite unclear which parts of the gentiles' heritage cultures survived when mixed with a Christ-identity. It is tempting to think that Paul manages at times to move from Jewishness to "non-Jewishness," but this is where the road ends. It seems that even in these cases Jewishness acts as the self-evident foundation ("chronic identification") against which new experiences and identifications are perpetually mirrored.

It is nonetheless important to also ask if there was something in Paul's past and upbringing that warrants positing another cultural framework for him besides Judaism. The main feature that stands out from Paul's letters is his use of the Greek language. This does not, however, automatically denote a knowledge system different from Judaism. In Paul's time, there was already an established Jewish tradition in Greek, including scriptural translations. Paul's use of Greek scriptural terminology and his knowledge of the Septuagint strongly suggest that the language of his Jewish education was Greek. There are only a few signs in Paul's letters that may point to his knowledge of Aramaic and/or Hebrew. First, Pharisaic education (Phil 3:5) was only available in Jerusalem, which Ehrensperger suggests makes it possible that he spent an extended period of time there receiving some form of education, most likely in Aramaic and/or Hebrew (2013, 136). E. P. Sanders is more skeptical of Paul's Palestinian Pharisaism: Paul's own claim to be a Pharisee (Phil 3:5) "probably means only that he believed in the resurrection and in some specific nonbiblical traditions" (2009, 77–78). Second, Paul uses some Aramaic terms (e.g., *Kephas*) but does not seem



[49] Ehrensperger 2013, 137: "As for his familiarity with the cultural traditions of the *ethne*, the indications in his letters are less evident."

to use Hebrew scriptures or to translate them to Greek.[50] Sanders notes that "[i]f Paul had a Pharisaic education, he would have memorized the Bible in Hebrew" (2009, 79). The reference to his background as a "Hebrew from Hebrews" (Phil 3:5) is vague. If it points to language, it may signify only a symbolic connection.[51] The connotation may also be geographical (Ehrensperger 2013, 149). If Paul was bi- or multilingual, Greek was either his first or early second language (with Aramaic as the first).[52] This means that Paul's heritage culture was Greco-Jewish. For the current argument, it is significant that Paul received his basic education in this Greco-Jewish form and not, for example, within the Greco-Roman education system (Ehrensperger 2013, 133–34). Paul's awareness of Greco-Roman rhetorical and philosophical traditions is popular in nature, meaning that it was probably acquired "in the marketplace" instead of at school (Ehrensperger 2013, 137).[53] A particular route, like an elite one, is not a prerequisite for the formation of a knowledge system.



Some additional insight into Paul's cultural identity is offered by Stanley Stowers (2011), who applies the point of view of the Bourdieusian "field," meaning "a space of norms and practices."[54] The concept is not incompatible with the notion of social identity or cultural knowledge

[50] In scriptural quotations, wordings closer to the Masoretic text than the Septuagint are sometimes understood as Paul's translations from Hebrew. It is more likely, however, that he follows in these cases Hebraizing revisions of Greek texts. See Kujanpää 2019, 6–7.

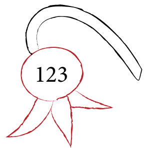
[51] According to Ehrensperger (2013, 58), the reference "may or may not refer to his knowledge or fluency in this language but certainly refers to the ongoing significance of the language to his sense of belonging." Hebrew was not a spoken language at the time and could only refer to literary tradition.

[52] Ehrensperger (2013, 137) takes Paul as bilingual with this qualification.

[53] According to Sanders, Paul had "probably not much instruction in classical Greek literature." As for Paul's educational background, Sanders tentatively suggests "a Jewish school that taught in Greek and made extensive use of the Greek translation of the Bible, with very little Greek literature in the curriculum" (2009, 80).

[54] "A game if you will" (Stowers 2011, 113); "a social space that floats free of certain kinds of place" (2011, 115).

systems. Stowers considers the Greco-Roman *paideia*[55] as a "translocal field of knowledge" that had "gained a semiautonomy from kings, patrons, and the economy in general" (2011, 113). For Stowers, Paul is *not* a member of the dominant elite who shared this body of knowledge, but a producer and distributor of an alternative, esoteric, and exotic *paideia* (2011, 116–17). Stowers believes that the minority and mixed ethnic or other statuses of the people receiving Paul's message led to their alienation from the legitimate *paideia,* which in turn attracted them to Paul's alternative version (2011, 116).[56] While Stowers recognizes that Paul was not a legitimate member of the dominant *paideia*, he sees Paul's alternative *paideia* as still recognizable as part of the "broader game of specialized literate learning."[57] Following Jonathan Z. Smith's differentiation between local and translocal traditions (the first denoting the locative religion centered on the land, household, family, and temple), Stowers claims that Paul's message was at points able to challenge the dominant *paideia*, since—due to its literary nature[58]—it was not entirely local either (2011, 111–13).[59] Stowers' reconstruction helps to situate Paul in the wider context of both the Greco-Roman *paideia* as well as various local cultures. From a social identity perspective, it seems that the boundary between the elite *paideia* and Paul's alternative system was impermeable: why else would an alternative system be needed? Paul's message thus represents a measure of *social creativity* with regard to a dominant Greco-Roman cultural knowledge system. However, it also reveals that Paul was aware of the dominant Greco-Roman *paideia* and had some type of access to its knowledge system.



[55] Meaning culture, education, rhetoric, sophistry, philosophy, ancient science, etc. widely construed (Stowers 2011, 113 n. 23).

[56] Those interested were "a niche of consumers who found social distinction in acquiring such *paideia*" (2011, 116).

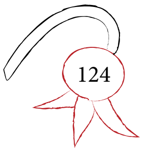
[57] Stowers 2011, 117. See also Ehrensperger (2013, 108): "Paul was not one of 'them.' He was one of those others–ruled, but not really civilized despite speaking Greek."

[58] Importantly, this also leads "towards universalizing knowledge and rhetoric" in his letters. This point of view is thus far missing from the hypotheses of a "particularistic" Paul (Stowers 2011, 115).

[59] Yet it did not carry a powerful background authority (Stowers 2011, 116).

Is "Being in Christ" a Knowledge System?

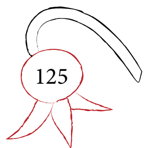
It is one of the hallmarks of modern Pauline studies that it avoids anachronistically attributing "Christianity" to Paul. Paul did not start (or follow) a new religion, and his message is deeply indebted to some of the central tenets of Judaism, which is Paul's heritage culture. It has been shown above, however, that Paul sometimes distances himself (even violently) from other central aspects of Judaism, although it is not always entirely obvious which knowledge system(s) he then switches to. Paul seems eager to identify with his gentile audience but is also at pains to view them as anything but stereotypical gentile sinners. At times, Paul also juxtaposes "being in Christ" with Jewishness. Sometimes this Christ-identity is portrayed as a superordinate category subsuming Jewishness (see discussion on 1 Corinthians above). In Philippians 3, Paul relates to his gentile audience that he has discarded his Jewish past and credentials "in order that [he] may gain Christ and be found in him" (3:8–9). This sounds as if the two are contrasted, and "being in Christ" is portrayed as a cultural framework to which one can switch. While it is probably a stretch to call "being in Christ" a knowledge system, I believe Paul does rhetorically suggest that it forms one. A modern scholar may say that this new system looks so much like Judaism that it remains subsumed in it. Pressed for a dispassionate answer, Paul might say the same. But from time to time, depending on the context, he points outward.



A Roman or Anti-Imperial Paul?

We now finally turn to viewing Paul more specifically in relation to *Romanitas* and the Roman Empire. As Ehrensperger notes: "Paul appears on the scene of history at a time and in a geographical area where the Roman Principate was firmly established, as was the claim of Roman rule around the entire Mediterranean basin" (2013, 107). In the light of Rome's relevance as a context for Paul's life and work, Ehrensperger then finds it "stunning" that this entity does not appear explicitly in Paul's letters (2013, 107). This silence has led many to

seek covert references to the Empire in Paul. A pioneer of this view is Richard Horsley, whose anti-imperial/postcolonial reading of Paul builds on James C. Scott's *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (1990), where Scott argues for the existence in society of a *public transcript* by the dominant elite and various *hidden transcripts* by the subordinate people.[60] Horsley views Paul as "spearheading an international movement of political resistance," albeit one that refrained from direct acts of revolt.[61] It is noteworthy that the anti-imperial readings of Paul are often married to a "Paul within Judaism" hermeneutic, the logic being that since Paul cannot find fault with Judaism, he must find it in the Roman Empire.[62] Ehrensperger for one considers Horsley's view to be exaggerated but still allows for "traces of implicit and at times coded interaction with Roman ideology" throughout Paul's letters (2013, 107). A natural, although not necessary, assumption behind an empire-critical Paul is that he does not have a strong Roman identity himself. Does the evidence support this notion?



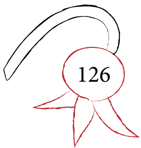
We may approach this question first by discussing Paul's alleged Roman citizenship. The question is tightly bound to the historical reliability of Acts, as no mention of citizenship is made in Paul's own

[60] The *public transcript* denotes the discourse controlled by the elite and visible to all. It is "the self-portrait of dominant elites as they would have themselves seen." The reactions of the subordinates, on the other hand, take many forms. First, the less fortunate can exploit the public image of the dominant to their own advantage, for example by appealing to the *alleged* goodwill of those in power. At the other extreme lies open defiance, which ruptures "the political *cordon sanitaire* between the hidden and the public transcript." Between these then is the vast field of *hidden transcripts*, which are "a politics of disguise and anonymity that takes place in public view but is designed to have a double meaning or to shield the identity of the actors." According to Scott, "rumor, gossip, folktales, jokes, songs, rituals, codes, and euphemisms—a good part of the folk culture of subordinate groups—fit this description" (1990, 2, 18–19).

[61] Horsley 2004b, 23. See also Horsley 2000, 2004a, 2008. Other proponents of the anti-imperial Paul include scholars such as Neil Elliott (1995), William S. Campbell (2008), and J. Brian Tucker (2010, 2011).

[62] Horsley 2004a, 3: "Instead of being opposed to Judaism, Paul's gospel of Christ was opposed to the Roman Empire."

letters. The Paul of Acts claims Roman citizenship in Acts 16:37–38 and 22:25–28. The latter reference is highly relevant to the rest of Paul's story in Acts: because his citizenship is revealed, Paul avoids torture and sentencing in Caesarea and is sent to Rome.[63] Roman citizenship was acquired in essentially three ways: paternally through birth, in connection with manumission, or by special concession from the authorities (e.g., because of achievement in military service).[64] Paul claims in Acts to have inherited his citizenship, which raises the question of Paul's family history. If Luke's story is taken as historical, Paul's forefathers must have gained Roman citizenship either through their manumission, social status, or achievements.[65] The matter of Paul's Roman citizenship needs, however, to be evaluated critically in light of our first-hand witness—Paul himself—who never mentions it. This is not merely an argument *e silentio*, since there are instances where Paul could be expected to mention his citizenship if he had one.[66] The author of Acts, on the other hand, with his emphasis on the harmonious relationship between Christ-followers and the state, has very good reasons to either fabricate the position or believe his mistaken sources about it. It is thus unlikely that Paul possessed Roman citizenship.



[63] Adams is correct in stating that "the entire final sequence of Acts, namely Paul's appeal, protection and travel to Rome, hinges entirely on Paul's Roman citizenship" (2008, 315). He is incorrect, however, to infer from this that the claim of citizenship is historically correct.

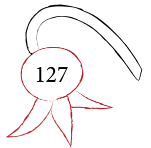
[64] Adams 2008, 309–10. Initially, citizenship was offered only to inhabitants of Rome, but between 70 and 28 BCE the number of citizens increased significantly. Finally, in 212 CE Caracalla made all free men citizens of Rome with the aim of acquiring more taxpayers and possible members of the military (Adams 2008, 309–15). As Roman citizenship became more available, the significance of social class increased (Tucker 2010, 104).

[65] Adams (2008, 320) suggests that Paul's family may have represented the upper class of Tarsus and would therefore have been offered citizenship when Pompey captured the city. This is, of course, complete conjecture.

[66] I think here especially of the letter to the Philippians, which Paul writes imprisoned by the Romans and to an audience in a Roman colony whom he seeks to impress with connections to the Roman imperial guard (Phil 1:13).

ISSN 2748-6419

While explicit references to Roman citizenship are clearly missing in Paul's letters, the question of whether he displays Roman ideas or ideology in a wider sense leaves much more room for interpretation. Paul certainly makes no reference to Roman law or mythology, nor does he emphasize a close connection to *Romanitas* by writing anything in Latin.[67] There are, however, situations where Paul identifies with some Roman values, namely Roman prejudices against the Jews. When Paul attacks those who demand physical circumcision of the Gentile Christ-followers (esp. Gal 5:12; Phil 3:2), he represents circumcision through Roman eyes as an act of ridiculous and barbaric castration.[68] In Philippians, this may have been part of Paul's attempt to identify with the audience and prime the Roman values of these inhabitants of a Roman colony. To be sure, we cannot know how well this procedure resonated with the audience. Paul's Roman derogatory stereotype of Jews is based on his stereotypical understanding of Romans—which again may signal distance from it.



According to J. Brian Tucker, concrete Roman identity markers are embedded in a "broader status-oriented cultural ethos of the Mediterranean basin" comprising the ideology of honor/shame and the systems of patronage and kinship.[69] These are, of course, abundantly reflected in Paul, but do not aid in detecting specifically Roman influences or a Roman sense of identity. The language and ideology of power can be counted within this wider ethos. While many have stressed

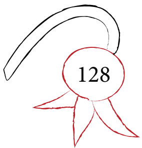
[67] Tucker summarizes the "concrete social identity markers" as "the toga, citizenship, Latin, and the law" (2010, 105). Romans had a special appreciation of Latin and expected Roman citizens to know it. From the Roman point of view, Greek was an official language, but clearly the second-best option, especially in public settings. The point may be mitigated by the fact that Greek was predominant in the Roman East, which means that Roman attitudes towards it may have been different there. See Ehrensperger 2013, 64–72.

[68] See Nikki 2018, 164. For the Roman phallic culture, see Crossan and Reed 2004, 257–69, and for Roman vilification of Jewish circumcision, see Smallwood 1981, 124.

[69] Tucker 2010, 105–17 (talking about these "ordering principles").

the difference between Rome and Judaism or Paul in this respect,[70] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has remarked that Paul seeks in his texts "to maintain his own authority by engaging the rhetorics of othering, censure, vituperation, exclusion, vilification, and even violence toward the community" with the result that "Paul's politics of meaning often seems not very different from the hegemonic discourses of domination and empire."[71] The protagonists may change, but not the "kyriarchal" ideology (Schüssler Fiorenza 2000, 50). This, of course, does not reveal that Paul identified with Rome, only that he does not oppose its ideology on this level.

One passage reveals Paul's attitude toward Roman authorities in a particularly straightforward manner. The text is Romans 13:1–7, which begins: "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God (13:1)." This passage is particularly important, as it is the only one where Paul explicitly discusses the issue of political authorities (Huttunen 2020, 105). This text has generated much discussion in New Testament scholarship because of its seemingly unproblematic call to obey political authorities (Huttunen 2020, 102). Niko Huttunen shows that the various attempts to mitigate the text (including anti-imperialist readings) lack a basis. He argues that the text does not represent a historically situational discourse[72] but a universal rule. It is not designed to convey irony, nor does it denote



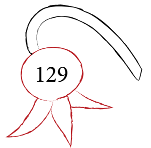
[70] According to Ehrensperger, Jews readily applied cultural influences from various sources—but only to stress the distinct identity of their own group "in the context of subjugation by dominating powers" (2013, 114).

[71] Schüssler Fiorenza 2000, 49. Schüssler Fiorenza calls for a true ideological criticism of Paul, and especially of the "scholarly rhetorics that foster a hermeneutics of identification with Paul" (2000, 50). Ehrensperger, reading Paul compliantly, offers but a weak counterargument: "Whether the use of a language of power inherently replicates structures of domination and subordination" is in her view "a matter of debate" (2019, 140).

[72] A good example of this line of argumentation is Elliott, who considers the passage "a foreign body" and believes that Paul encourages submission to authorities, particularly in the Roman setting, "for now" in order "to safeguard the most vulnerable around and among the Roman Christians, those Jews struggling

heavenly authorities instead of worldly ones. Moreover, the passage does not qualify the authorities in any way or suggest that they are bound by a higher law.[73] The power of the authorities is not limited to an earthly regimen in Lutheran style. The text simply suggests that rulers are to be obeyed without qualification (Huttunen 2020, 106–15). The statement is unconditional and absolute.[74]

Huttunen considers Paul's argument for obeying the authorities to arise from the Greco-Roman idea of the *law of the stronger*, for which Huttunen offers several examples from contemporary literature (2020, 113–19). He also argues that the law of the stronger was not completely arbitrary concerning the ethical requirements of the powerful, who were "not without obligations for the good of the weaker." He sees this as operating behind Paul's statement on the authorities working "for your good" (Rom 13:4) (2020, 124–25).



Huttunen accepts that Paul clearly places the one God of Israel above earthly rulers. He does not, however, consider this to be a sign of subversiveness (2020, 108). According to Huttunen, Paul simply participates in the Jewish tradition of submitting to the imperial power without abandoning monotheism. Importantly, this tradition was recognized and accepted by the Romans. For Paul, this "Jewish imperial theology was a means to legitimately avoid the Roman gods" (Huttunen 2020, 118). In Huttunen's solution, Paul speaks and acts from the weaker position of a minority, and his submission to earthly authorities is coupled with a parallel reality and "fantasy" regarding the kingdom of God. The belief that this kingdom would eventually conquer all served as a politically safe way to cope with reality, but it was not a hidden or covert wish.[75]

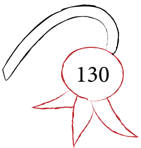
to rebuild their shattered community in the wake of imperial violence" (1997, 203).

[73] The idea of earthly authorities being bound by a law that stands higher than them is a later, emphatically Western development (Huttunen 2020, 109–10).

[74] Huttunen (2020, 102, 105) still admits that Paul has occasional critical remarks on the authorities as well (e.g., 1 Cor 15:24).

[75] Huttunen (2020, 136–37) emphasizes that some of the ideals of the imaginary world eventually became reality through the general influence of Christianity.

The social identity approach recognizes that subordinate groups apply different strategies in relation to dominant groups—from direct competition to various forms of social creativity—depending on their cognitive belief systems and their understanding of the legitimacy of the situation (Hogg and Abrams 1988). Huttunen's view of Romans 13 translates well to the social identity and multicultural perspectives. From this theoretical framework, revolution and subversion amount to *social competition* with a group of higher status. As was indicated above, a blatant challenge to the superior group is not a common occurrence with lower-status minority groups. By creating a spiritual alternative (thus, an alternative level of comparison), Paul engages in *social creativity* and not social competition. Social creativity is based on the cognitive conviction that the boundaries between the lower and higher groups are impermeable and that the lower group cannot openly challenge the higher group. Furthermore, it considers the existing power relations as legitimate (hence, "the law of the stronger"). This is a more typical reaction by minorities and is essentially what differentiates this reaction from the "hidden transcript" hypothesis, which views dissatisfaction with the dominant group as the main motivator. Social creativity measures are mainly intended to boost the ingroup's self-esteem through creative measures meant for "internal consumption." Importantly, Paul also fosters harmony and secure attachment between the ingroup and the Empire by stressing that the authorities are "God's servant for your good" (Rom 13:4). Despite his accepting attitude toward Rome, Paul is clearly not identifying with the Romans here (although he may do it elsewhere at times). He is not, however, being subversive either. Indeed, Paul never formulates a this-worldly legal or administrative system that would contest the Empire (Schröter 2017).



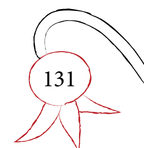
It is tempting to suggest that Romans 13, as a uniquely straightforward and informative statement regarding Paul's attitude toward the Empire, should inform the interpretation of less explicit references as well.[76] This would certainly be a more legitimate starting point than advancing from hidden meanings in vaguer texts and then attempting to

[76] On the hierarchy between clear and implicit texts in mirror-reading Paul's texts, see Nikki 2019, 28–31, 44.

fit the single explicit text into that narrative. However, a serious caveat is included in the very idea of Paul's multicultural and flexible identity, which makes it genuinely possible that at times he may have engaged in criticism of the Empire as well. In this, Pauline studies could benefit from a multicultural perspective that takes Paul's access to many cultural knowledge systems seriously.

Conclusion

This article looked at the ways Paul represents multiple cultural identifications in his letters. Two theoretical frameworks enabled the recognition of this multiplicity. First, the recent advances in viewing the Roman Empire from the perspective of globalization were used to problematize a monolithic and state-centered view of Romanness and to replace it with a more realistic view of multiple centers, identities, and networks in Rome. This perspective, along with purely exegetical observations, was applied to complicate the currently popular theory of Paul as highly critical of the Roman Empire. Second, the perspective of multiculturalism was applied to account for Paul's various knowledge systems, between which he, as a member of the globalized Roman Empire, could switch according to the varying contexts and intergroup situations he found himself in. What emerged was an image of a multifaceted individual. Paul is robustly and "chronically" a Jewish man, but he sometimes emphatically and expressly denies central aspects of Judaism. He is not a citizen of Rome, but sometimes takes a stereotypically Roman point of view when deriding Jews. He attempts to create an alternative *paideia* but reveals in the process his dependence on and knowledge of the Greco-Roman elite *paideia* (Stowers 2011). Lastly, he does not establish a new people or religion, yet suggests that "being in Christ" might fill the requirements of a new cultural knowledge system.



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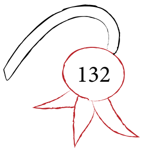

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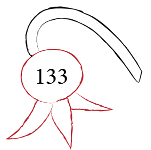

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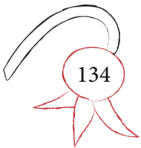

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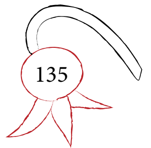

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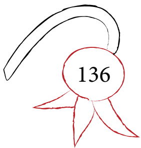

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