

fatal relationship between Herod and his sons (Chapter 6), to finally the description of Herod's painful death (Chapter 7). Throughout, the authors offer a number of fresh and surprising readings. This is especially true for their suggestion that the deterioration of Herod into tyranny goes back to Nicolaus who did not hide how Herod increasingly got overwhelmed by his passions, lost his ability to rule according to justice, and eventually became highly prone to manipulation since this deterioration could serve as a scaffold for Nicolaus to present himself as a true friend and the best advisor one could get, who managed at least partially to demask the forces working against his patron. If this is correct, the real collision of opinion between Nicolaus and Josephus is not so much to be found in their portrayal of Herod's tyrannical nature. Rather, while Nicolaus eventually accused the Jewish nation of being an 'unruly people' that was partially to blame for the downfall of Herod, Josephus needs, in post-war Flavian Rome, to circumvent any suggestion that the Jewish people will never be accommodable within the Roman hegemony – and, for this reason, Josephus goes out of his way to present Herod as an impious lawbreaker whose actions provoked a nascent resistance that eventually grew into full-scale rebellion.

Czajkowski and Eckhardt have provided a highly learned study that leaves plenty of room for thought and further interaction. This is the case even if one eventually remains unconvinced at the end. Indeed, the authors readily admit that their study is conjectural and that 'possibility is not certainty' (p. 169). There is no way of doing away with the fact that our access to the Herod *of* history is shielded behind the aims and purposes of the 'historians' Nicolaus and Josephus. By rethinking how Herod was treated *in* history, Czajkowski and Eckhardt have provided a fresh start for further Herodian biographical prospects. A final caveat: considering the difficulty of accessing the partly lost writings of Nicolaus, it would have been beneficial to provide an outline of the preservation of his texts and modern editions hereof.

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ABOUT EARLY CHRISTIANS

FLEXSENHAR III (M.) *Christians in Caesar's Household. The Emperors' Slaves in the Makings of Christianity*. Pp. xvi + 191, ill., maps. Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019. Cased, US\$89.95 (Paper, US\$29.95). ISBN: 978-0-271-08233-2 (978-0-271-08234-9 pbk).

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This book interrogates the afterlife of one short phrase within one verse in the New Testament. The verse is Philippians 4:22, where Paul ends his letter to the community at Philippi with a greeting to 'saints from Caesar's household'. (Mis)interpretations of this verse have had a large impact on the development of Christianity from the second

and third centuries until the present. Paul's fleeting reference led readers to wonder just who these believers living and working under the Emperor might have been. As early Christian writers stretched their imaginations, stories of enslaved Christians living within the Emperor's walls yet refusing to worship the Emperor and other Roman gods began to emerge in their writings. These stories featured large numbers of enslaved Christians who were responsible for the growth of Christianity and the elevation of prominent Christians to leadership positions within the Roman Empire. F. convincingly disproves this triumphalist narrative through careful and thorough attention to texts, inscriptions and archaeological evidence. This volume is a turning point in scholarship, especially for scholars writing on slavery, empire and the development of early Christianity.

As F. correctly points out, enslaved workers in the imperial household were indeed slaves, even though they lived within a wealthy and powerful space. They experienced all the similar horrific treatment that enslaved workers in rural and urban areas would have experienced, such as corporal punishment, torture, separation from their families and involuntary labour (p. 13). Scholars in the past have alluded to the possible 'benefits' that a high-ranking slave – like one who was working for the Emperor – would have received. F. rejects this language, noting that all of these so-called positive benefits were products of the system of slavery and that they were used to control and dominate the human beings who were enslaved. This book therefore joins other recent scholarship on Roman slavery that dismantles dangerous ideas about enslavement in the Roman era.

The first four chapters deal primarily with texts, while the final two chapters analyse archaeological evidence. Chapter 1 engages with Paul's letter to the Philippians and the various interpretations of verse 4:22. The second chapter focuses on the *Martyrdom of Paul* and the *Acts of Peter*, two apocryphal narratives expanding upon Phil 4:22 by creating characters who were enslaved Christians in the imperial household. As F. writes, 'both texts constructed a Christian cultural history and a geography centered in the imperial capital' (p. 59). Chapter 3 turns to two Christian polemic and apologetic texts: Hippolytus of Rome's *Refutation of All Heresies* and Tertullian's letter *To Scapula*. Here F. illustrates how these authors used the idea of Christian imperial slaves to support their arguments in defence of Christianity. Chapter 4 tells the story of Euelpistus, the fictional imperial slave whose martyrdom is narrated in *Acts of Justin and Companions*. This story is set during the reign of Emperor Decius, and it enables F. to challenge the definition of 'Christian' in the third century and argue that scholars need to be more flexible in their use of the term in these early centuries.

F. analyses texts, as is clear, but also integrates archaeological evidence and material culture seamlessly throughout the book. Chapters 5 and 6 are primarily focused on two such examples: the Prosenes monument and inscriptions from the catacombs in Rome. This archaeological evidence further supports F.'s argument that the presence of powerful Christian imperial slaves in the emperor's household is an invention of ancient Christians and has been perpetuated by modern scholars. For example, F. describes the importance of the Prosenes monument in Rome – erected in 217 CE – in Chapter 5. He narrates the discovery of the monument in 1830 and the subsequent (mis)interpretations of the inscription with suspense and anticipation. This monument, F. says, is 'quite Roman', but it has been used as proof that enslaved Christians lived in the imperial household. Yet, he carefully and successfully argues that archaeologists and scholars of early Christianity persistently read more into the monument than was likely intended.

For example, one phrase on the inscription led G. Battista de Rossi (the archaeologist who compiled a collection of Christian inscriptions in Rome) to determine that Prosenes was a Christian imperial freedman 'gathered to god' (*receptus ad deum*, p. 90). De

Rossi and others interpreted *deus* as referring to the Christian god. F. rejects this assumption. He writes: 'Because in the end, binary religious categories such as "pagan" or "Christian," which have so often been used to brand a religious identity onto the material, obscure rather than elucidate the breadth of significance that an artefact could have in its specific environment' (p. 94). Using the Prosenes monument as a case study, F. examines inscriptions of imperial slaves and freed persons found within Rome's catacombs in Chapter 6. He carefully illustrates that these inscriptions are not proof that Christian slaves were present in the imperial household in the third century. As F. writes, 'the ability of modern interpreters to identify Christians in the imperial household by citing inscriptions, even from Rome's catacombs, is equally complex as the Prosenes monument' (p. 102).

One of the strengths of the book is F.'s ability to narrate a story from historical documents and draw readers in while doing so. For example, Chapter 4 opens with a description of the edict of Decius (250 CE) and the response of Christians after the decree. As F. notes, most Christians 'simply complied' (p. 76). In the years following Decius' edict, Christian authors wrestled with this compliance through their writing, and the result was the creation of narratives that told stories about fictional martyrs who refused to worship the emperor and Roman gods. These attempts to rewrite the history of nascent Christianity ultimately affected the trajectory of Christianity. F. illustrates this through his analysis of the *Acts of Justin and Companions*, especially the addition of a story about an enslaved imperial worker named Euelpistus. This example from F.'s book also exemplifies why it is an excellent opening monograph for the new 'Inventing Christianity' series published by Pennsylvania State University Press and edited by L.S. Cobb and D. Eastman.

Finally, the book includes two appendices that are a beneficial addition to the project. Appendix 1 outlines F.'s work unravelling the arguments made by J.B. Lightfoot which suggested (and seemingly convinced many other scholars) that the phrase 'saints from Caesar's household' in Philippians 4:22 was connected to the Christian imperial freedmen mentioned in 1 Clement. From there, Lightfoot argued that authors like Irenaeus and Tertullian referenced these enslaved Christians as well (p. 134). Appendix 2 adds three more inscriptions to the ones examined in Chapters 4 and 5. While they are not analysed as thoroughly, they are helpful examples that solidify the argument that these inscriptions are best understood not as specifically Christian, but more broadly as Roman (p. 141). Both of these appendices could stand alone as a resource for students and scholars.

This book exemplifies why Classicists and biblical scholars should be in conversation with one another more frequently. F. is a biblical scholar who has also done extensive work in archaeology, but his book engages classical sources and authors regularly and with ease. The result is a brilliantly argued book that is a necessary addition to scholarship on slavery in antiquity as well as early Christianity and Pauline Studies. I highly recommend the volume, and I suspect that F.'s work will have a profound impact on future scholarship and the continued correction of the triumphalist narrative of Christianity.

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