New Testament Studies (2024), **70**, 307–323
doi:10.1017/S0028688523000425

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

ARTICLE

The Textual Demiurge: Social Status and the Academic Discourse of Early Christian Forgery*

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Abstract

This article reconsiders the classed and gendered construction of the Author in the Roman Mediterranean, a construction that generates the intertwined notions of authorship and authenticity. Modern scholarly conversations about authorship and pseudepigraphy in the Roman Mediterranean often proceed from the uninterrogated assumptions that (a) ancient texts (including early Christian texts) were the monographic products of solitary authors and (b) everyone in antiquity, regardless of gender or class, had access to the status of being an 'Author'. While conversations about (in)authentic textual production extend beyond the works that become part of the New Testament, these twin assumptions form the basis for modern debates about 'forgery' in New Testament literature. This article challenges both assumptions by first surveying the role of uncredited collaboration in Roman literary culture and then analysing ancient Christian discourses surrounding (a) illicit textual meddling and (b) inappropriate textual ascription. These two discursive categories reveal how the categories of class and gender are entangled with early Christian ideas of the Author. Ancient discourses of authenticity and authorship were not simply about who produced texts but about policing which acts of textual production count as 'authoring'.

Keywords: forgery; pseudepigraphy; reading; textuality; editing; class; social status; enslavement; Marcion of Sinope; Theodotus of Byzantium

1. Introduction

For the *literati* of eighteenth-century London, the headline story of 1777 was the discovery of a collection of poems authored by the unknown mediaeval monk Thomas Rowley. The collection elicited considerable excitement, but its misuse of Latinisms attracted sceptical detractors as experts debated worrying features of the text. By the time a third edition was published the next year, an appendix of criticisms of the text's authenticity was attached to the book. Eventually, the forger was revealed to be the sixteen-year-old prodigy, poet and serial forger Thomas Chatterton. Chatterton had artificially aged the manuscripts by drying them with tea and applying dirt to the parchment. He occasionally sought to deflect criticism by claiming to have transcribed his edition from an earlier

* We are grateful to Simon Gathercole, Tom Geue, Joseph Howley, Kelsie Rodenbiker, the anonymous reviewers of this article, and everyone involved at Cambridge University Press for their suggestions, assistance, and hard work on this project. Translations are our own unless otherwise noted.

text.[1] Yet Chatterton's critics were not particularly interested in the practical mechanics of forgery. Thomas Warton, Professor of Poetry at Trinity College, Oxford, concluded his critique of the text by noting, 'I do not wish to rest my proof on evidences of this nature. It is not from the complexion of ink or of parchment' that accusations of forgery should be based. 'Our arguments', he continues, 'should be drawn from principles of taste, from analogical experiment, from a familiarity with ancient poetry, and from the gradations of composition... A man furnished with a just portion of critical discernment, and in the meantime totally unacquainted with the history of these poems, is sufficiently, perhaps most properly, qualified, to judge of their authenticity'.[2] Warton's interest in the educated man's ability to unmask the forger resonates with both ancient and modern audiences.[3] Yet, even as academic *Echtheitskritik* ('authenticity criticism') has focused on questions of truth and on the intellectual tools that might help us reach it, this discourse – for Warton, for ancient writers like Gellius, and for scholars today – has often ignored the role of social status in the construction of the Author.[4]

Modern scholarship on pseudepigraphy in the Roman Mediterranean, including but not limited to New Testament studies, has clustered around two oppositional poles: either (a) it interrogates the ethical and psychological conditions of writing in the name of others or (b) it analyses the traditioned literary practices through which people learned to imitate the writings of others and participated in authorial traditions. These two scholarly projects often stand in direct opposition to one another. While some argue that ancient pseudepigraphy was a deceitful and (often) polemical practice, others describe it as a normative and traditioned aspect of literary education and production in Mediterranean antiquity.

Both conversations about authorship and pseudepigraphy often proceed from two uninterrogated assumptions. First, scholars have assumed that ancient texts were the 'monographic' products of solitary Authors unless they tell us otherwise – and even sometimes when they *do* tell us otherwise (e.g., Rom 16.22).[5] Second, scholars have assumed that everyone, regardless of gender or class, had access to the status of being an 'Author'. In this article, we challenge these assumptions in order to reconsider the classed and gendered construction of the Author in the Roman Mediterranean, a construction that generates the intertwined notions of authorship and authenticity.[6] While

[1] A. Grafton, *Forgers and Critics: Creativity and Duplicity in Western Scholarship* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990) 54; J. Rosenblum, *Practice to Deceive: The Amazing Stories of Literary Forgery's Most Notorious Practitioners* (New Castle: Oak Knoll, 2000).

[2] T. Warton, *An Enquiry into the Authenticity of the Poems Attributed to Thomas Rowley, in which the Arguments of the Dean of Exeter and Mr. Bryant are Examined* (London: J. Dodsley, 1782) 125.

[3] On the role of Greek and Roman intellectuals in discerning and identifying forgeries, see J. A. Howley, 'Reading Against the Grain: Book Forgery and Book Labour at Rome', in *Forgery Beyond Deceit: Fabrication, Value, and the Desire for Ancient Rome* (ed. S. McGill and J. N. Hopkins; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023) 93–120; J. Coogan, C. R. Moss, and J. A. Howley, 'The Socioeconomics of Fabrication: Textuality, Authenticity, and Class in the Roman Mediterranean', *Arethusa* 57 (2024).

[4] We use the graphic convention 'Author' to signify the cultural status of 'the' Author, apart from the identity of any individual figure. In this, while our analysis is grounded in the socio-cultural realities of Mediterranean antiquity, it also resonates with twentieth-century post-structuralist critiques of the Author associated with Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault.

[5] For rare exceptions, see E. R. Richards, *The Secretary in the Letters of Paul* (WUNT II/42; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991); C. R. Moss, 'The Secretary: Enslaved Workers, Stenography, and the Production of Early Christian Literature', *Journal of Theological Studies* 74 (2023) 20–56. See discussion below. For the language of 'monographic' Authors, see A. Savoie, 'The Women Behind Times New Roman: The Contribution of Type Drawing Offices to Twentieth Century Type-making', *Journal of Design History* 33 (2020) 209–24, esp. 210.

[6] On gender and authorship, see K. King, 'What is an Author? Ancient Author-Function in the *Apocryphon of John* and the Apocalypse of John', in *Scribal Practices and Social Structures among Jesus Adherents: Essays in Honour*

Echtheitskritik has centred on questions of truth, we propose instead thinking about 'forgery' in terms of power: How did people compose texts in antiquity? Who, from the coterie of those involved in composition, had access to the status of Author? How was the role of Author constructed and policed?

This article first surveys the academic conversation on pseudepigraphy before turning to discuss practices of textual production in the Roman Mediterranean. Drawing on recent scholarship in the field of book history, we observe the role of collaboration in ancient Mediterranean literary culture. The presence of multiple sets of hands in the compositional process complicates the monographic focus of much New Testament scholarship.[7] We move, finally, to ancient Christian discourses surrounding the interwoven phenomena of illicit textual meddling and inappropriate textual ascription. These two categories enable us to analyse how class and gender were entangled with early Christian ideas of the Author. While such ancient conversations about (in)authentic textual production extend beyond those works that become part of the New Testament, these ancient discourses continue to shape modern debates about 'forgery' in New Testament literature.

Before we continue, however, a note on the limitations of categories: as many scholars have discussed, the ancient language of pseudepigraphy (*pseudepigraphon*) abundant in academic literature does not fully reflect the varied circumstances in which a text inscribed by one person might circulate attributed to another.[8] It is used for each of the following kinds of texts even when the dynamics are distinct: works composed in the name of others; works that fall outside of the canon; works that have been misattributed; and literary traditions that attach themselves to 'authentic' works.[9] While ancient writers sometimes used the term (e.g., Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *De Din.* 11), they also employed the language of paternal (il)legitimacy (Quintilian, *Inst.* 1.4.3) or fabrication (Tertullian of Carthage, *Bapt.* 17).[10] Moreover, the modern binary between 'authentic' and 'inauthentic' frequently fails to map the varied ancient categories for texts whose authorship was disputed but which remained useful.[11] To circumvent some of these

of John S. Kloppenborg (ed. W.E. Arnal, et al; BETL; Leuven: Peeters, 2016) 15–42. King employs the idea of author-function developed by M. Foucault, 'What is an Author?' in *The Foucault Reader* (ed. P. Rabinow; New York: Pantheon, 1984) 101–20. See further M. Ahuvia, 'Reimagining the Gender and Class Dynamics of Premodern Composition', *Journal of Ancient Judaism* 14 (2023) 1–34.

[7] See W. A. Johnson, *Reading and Reading Culture in the High Roman Empire: A Study of Elite Communities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). On enslaved workers: R. Winsbury, *The Roman Book* (London: Duckworth, 2009) 79–85; R. J. Starr, 'Reading Aloud: *Lectores* and Roman Reading', *Classical Journal* 86 (1991) 337–43; W. Fitzgerald, *Slavery and the Roman Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); T. Habinek, 'Slavery and Class', in *A Companion to Latin Literature* (ed. S. Harrison; Oxford: Blackwell, 2005) 385–93; J. A. Howley, 'In Ancient Rome', in *Further Reading* (ed. M. Rubery and L. Price; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020) 15–27. On enslaved workers and collaboration in early Christian texts, see C. R. Moss, 'Fashioning Mark: Early Christian Discussions about the Scribe and Status of the Second Gospel', *NTS* 67 (2021) 181–204; J. Coogan, 'Tabular Thinking in Late Ancient Palestine: Instrumentality, Work, and the Construction of Knowledge', in *Knowledge Construction in Late Antiquity* (ed. M. Amsler; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2023) 57–81, esp. 60–1, 66–7; Moss, 'Secretary'.

[8] H. Najman and I. Peirano, 'Pseudepigraphy as an Interpretative Construct', in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Fifty Years of the Pseudepigrapha Section at the SBL* (ed. M. Henze and L. I. Lied; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2019), 331–55, at 332–7. On the emergence of the scholarly category of pseudepigrapha, see A. Y. Reed, 'The Modern Invention of "Old Testament" Pseudepigrapha', *JTS* 60 (2009) 403–36.

[9] For helpful efforts to introduce scholarly precision, see Najman and Peirano, 'Pseudepigraphy'; B. D. Ehrman, *Forgery and Counter-Forgery: The Use of Literary Deceit in Early Christian Polemics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 26–67. Texts that once circulated anonymously might, at a later point in time, be attributed to others. On anonymous writing in the Roman world, see T. Geue, *Author Unknown: The Power of Anonymity in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019).

[10] On fabrication and textual illegitimacy, see, e.g., Coogan, Moss, and Howley, 'Socioeconomics of Fabrication'.

[11] Ancient taxonomies often included further categories. A prominent example is Eusebius' category of ἀντιλεγόμενα (e.g., *Hist. eccl.* 3.3.3; 3.25.3; 3.25.6; 3.31.6; 6.13.6; 6.14.1). While Eusebius' heuristic division focuses

complexities and confusions, we instead orient our analysis around the figure of the Author and the conditions for 'authorship' in the Roman Mediterranean.

2. The Academic Conversation

In the Roman Mediterranean, literate people regularly wrote in the names of other, usually better-known, individuals. This fact is undisputed in scholarship and has resulted in an academic cottage industry devoted to debating authenticity and identifying ancient forgeries. This project of *Echtheitskritik* also poses a question about the social norms that governed such pseudonymous textual production. Was writing in the names of others socially and morally acceptable? In the field of biblical studies, the question has often been entangled with notions of deceit and falsehood. Others situate ancient pseudepigrapha in contexts of polemic; pseudepigraphic texts are imagined as attacks on some perceived authentic textual afterlife or as hostile takeovers of the legacy of a particular figure. In New Testament scholarship – where fierce debates still rage over the authorship of 2 Thessalonians, Ephesians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, James, 1 and 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, and Jude – the question of deceit is fraught. If the notion of early Christian forgery is unsettling, the idea of a forged New Testament might seem to rock the theological foundations.

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, many scholars working within this paradigm accepted a compromise: while deceitful forgery occurred in antiquity, many Christian forgeries would better be categorised as 'pious frauds' or 'genuine religious pseudepigraphy'.[12] On this account, those who composed such texts did not seek to deceive others but were instead 'genuinely' inspired by a religious figure or spiritual entity. Thus, no deception was involved. But in Anglophone scholarship, this détente ended with the publication of a series of works by Jed Wyrick, Bart Ehrman, and Hugo Mendez that each link pseudepigraphy to deceit and, to various degrees, polemic.[13] Central for this argument about forgery are two ideas: First, these scholars each present

on whether books are 'scriptural' (with an intermediate category of 'disputed' books), other ancient readers employed a category of 'books useful for the soul' that is not primarily oriented around 'scriptural' status. On this see, F. Bovon, 'Beyond the Canonical and the Apocryphal Books, the Presence of a Third Category: The Books Useful for the Soul', *HTR* 105 (2012) 125–37.

[12] A. Gudeman, 'Literary Frauds among the Greeks', *TAPA* 25 (1894) 140–64; W. Speyer, *Die literarische Fälschung im heidnischen und christlichen Altertum* (Munich: Beck, 1971); B. Metzger, 'Literary Forgeries and Canonical Pseudepigrapha', *JBL* 91 (1972) 3–24; A. D. Baum, *Pseudepigraphie und literarische Fälschung im frühen Christentum: Mit ausgewählten Quellentexten samt deutscher Übersetzung* (WUNT II/138; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001). Important studies include the essays contained in *Pseudepigraphie und Verfasserfiktion in frühchristlichen Briefen* (ed. Jörg Frey, Jens Herzer, Martina Janßen, and Clare K. Rothschild; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009). Vital work in this field has been accomplished in German-language scholarship. While Speyer's magisterial study is often noted in Anglophone scholarship, the contributions of others are often neglected. Nonetheless, in the present article, we address a configuration of the authorship question that is particularly prominent in Anglophone scholarship; as a result, we here focus on that body of literature.

[13] J. Wyrick, *The Ascension of Authorship: Attribution and Canon Formation in Jewish, Hellenistic, and Christian Traditions* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004); Ehrman, *Forgery and Counter-Forgery*; H. Méndez, 'Did the Johannine Community Exist?', *JSNT* 42 (2020) 350–74. The most well-known is Ehrman's study. For an appreciative and theoretically informed assessment of Ehrman's work, see D. Brakke, 'Early Christian Lies and the Lying Liars Who Wrote Them', *Journal of Religion* 96 (2016) 378–90. While for some, like Speyer, deceitful forgery could be distinguished from the pious fraud, Ehrman is unconvinced. Nor does Ehrman distinguish, as Baum does, between authentic words and authentic content. In Baum's view, 'an authorial attribution was regarded as authentic and nondeceptive if either the wording or the content of a particular text could be traced back to the author whose name it carried', in A. Baum, 'Content and Form: Authorship, Attribution and Pseudonymity in Ancient Speeches, Letters, Lectures, and Translations – A Rejoinder to Bart Ehrman', *JBL* 136 (2017) 381–403, at 402.

writing as a punctiliar activity that does not involve editing, revision, or post-compositional interventions. (Or, at least, if these take place, they are distinct from the activities that constitute the Author.) Second, these accounts often maintain that ancient people always rejected forgeries as deceptive and, thus, objected to any pseudepigraphic project.[14]

A second scholarly conversation runs in parallel to this debate about the intentions of the forgery and nature of textual authenticity. In this second conversation, pseudepigraphy is imagined not as deception but rather as an aesthetic, a form of reception or a discursive practice. In this view, advanced in recent years by Irene Peirano Garrison and Hindy Najman in their respective fields, pseudepigraphy is a 'game' or discourse that sought to 'return [or restore] the authentic teachings' of a particular figure. As such, 'pseudonymous attribution is a literary device that engages, elaborates on, and re-interprets a tradition'. As a literary device, the 'fake', writes Peirano Garrison, is a 'literary type with its own rules'. This approach takes a more open-ended, processual notion of writing. Over time, ancient figures and central literary traditions were supplemented by generations of ancient copyists, text critics and editors.[15] For these scholars, ancient education is central to an understanding of pseudepigraphy. People shaped by the educational practices of Greek παιδεία learned to write via imitation. An educational project that centred on *mimēsis* and imitation prepared the student for a pseudepigraphic career and implicitly validated pseudepigrapha as a literary form and traditional practice.[16] That advanced education so regularly involved the production of texts that were assembled and arranged by students and attributed to teachers further problematises the way that we think about authorship in antiquity, to say nothing of our ability to identify and locate those figures.[17]

To these heuristic distinctions between academic *foci*, we might add other complicating factors, both historical and methodological, that relate to wider conversations about authorship. First, as David Lincicum has demonstrated, debates about authorship have wider implications for the audiences and situations implied by the texts. If a text is a communication between an Author and an audience in a particular situation, then it is problematic for scholars to assume that the situation implied by the text is 'real' while

[14] Important texts in this conversation include 2 Th 2.2, which warns its readers about other false letters in Paul's name.

[15] See I. Peirano, *The Rhetoric of the Roman Fake* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); H. Najman, *Seconding Sinai: The Development of Mosaic Discourse in Second Temple Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 2003). Other important studies include A. Y. Reed, 'Pseudepigraphy, Authorship, and the Reception of "The Bible"', in *Late Antiquity: Proceedings of the Montréal Colloquium in Honour of Charles Kannengiesser* (Leiden: Brill, 2008) 467–90; E. Mroczek, *The Literary Imagination in Jewish Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). This work on accumulating traditions is partly anticipated by H. R. Balz, 'Anonymität und Pseudepigraphie im Urchristentum: Überlegungen zum literarischen und theologischen Problem der urchristlichen und gemeinantiken Pseudepigraphie', *ZTK* 66 (1969) 403–36.

[16] On ancient education, see H. Najman, 'Texts and Figures in Ancient Jewish *Paideia*', in *Past Renewals: Interpretive Authority, Renewed Revelation and the Quest for Perfection in Jewish Antiquity* (ed. H. Najman; Leiden: Brill, 2010) 253–65; K. Rodenbiker, 'Marking Scriptural Figures as Sacred Names', *Religions* 13 (2022): https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13070577. This scholarship builds upon studies of ancient education by R. Cribiore, *Writing, Teachers, and Students in Graeco-Roman Egypt* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996) and T. Morgan, *Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[17] The classic example is Epictetus and Arrian and the 'authorship' of *The Discourses.* See Arrian's discussion of his role in the preface, as well as discussion in B. Nongbri, Review of R. F. Walsh, 'The Origins of Early Christian Literature: Contextualizing the New Testament within Greco-Roman Literary Culture' in *BMCR* 2021.09.11. Compare Origen's discussion of the authorship of Hebrews in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.25.13–14, with discussion in M. J. Thomas, 'Origen on Paul's Authorship of Hebrews', *NTS* 65 (2019) 598–609; W. Campbell, *The Pauline History of Hebrews* (New York: Oxford University Press) forthcoming.

the Author claimed by the text is an epistolary fiction. If one leg of the 'communicative triad of author, addressee and situation' is destabilised then so are the others.[18] If the Author is a fiction, on what basis are the situation and addressees judged to be 'real'? Second, writing in the name of others is a well-attested phenomenon beyond high-status literary contexts. A plethora of examples attest 'low-status' writing from graffiti in which successive writers added to the compositions of earlier graffiti writers, both named and unnamed.[19] Finally, if ancient authorship often involved competitive textualisation among elite reading circles, do we not find precedents for pseudonymous literary practices long after writers graduated from the *paedagogium*?[20] In these textual communities, pseudonymity was less about deception than about competition and entertainment.[21]

While much of the academic conversation surrounding pseudepigraphic writing in the Roman Mediterranean operates at the level of ethics and discourse, the interest in ancient education directs us to the realities of ancient textual work. When, where, and by whom were ancient texts produced? As elementary as these questions are, they are often overlooked. The question 'why did an author choose to lie?' presupposes that all those involved in textual production had access to authorial status. Challenging this assumption requires that we look at the realities of ancient writing practice.

3. The *Realia* of Writing

If productivity is a virtue, then Pliny the Elder – military commander, natural philosopher and encyclopaedist – has a strong claim to sainthood. Yet his extraordinary accomplishments were not solitary endeavours. In one epistolary encomium, the Younger Pliny describes the frenetic pace of his uncle's workday and the cadences of his literary habits (*Ep.* 3.5). The Elder Pliny was read aloud to during meals, baths and leisure time. A secretary was constantly at his side to take dictation whether he was being carried in a chair, travelling on the road or receiving a massage. The time-efficient naturalist was always at work, but so were the many others who excerpted texts, took notes and navigated the voluminous material that formed the bedrock for the *Natural History*. An enormous amount of cognitively sophisticated literary work took place around the Great Man.

When the Younger Pliny turned to the organisation of his own literary works – his letter collection – he too exploited the skills of others. As Sarah Blake has demonstrated, we should not picture Pliny on his hands and knees arranging the material but instead a team of readers, notaries and secretaries gathering and imputing order and, thus, meaning to the collection.[22] Ancient writing was a collaborative process that exploited the skills of often invisible servile others. As recent work at the intersection of classics and book

[18] D. Lincicum, 'Mirror-Reading a Pseudepigraphal Letter', *NovT* 59 (2017) 171–93, quoting p. 172.

[19] On collaborative authorship in Pompeii graffiti, see K. Milnor, *Graffiti and the Literary Landscape in Roman Pompeii* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014) 159–74.

[20] See here the recent arguments of Chris Keith and Robyn Walsh. The phrase 'competitive textualization' comes from Keith's work. R. F. Walsh, *The Origins of Early Christian Literature: Contextualizing the New Testament within Greco-Roman Literary Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021) 88; Chris Keith, 'The Competitive Textualization of the Jesus Tradition in John 20:30–31 and John 21:24–25', *CBQ* 78 (2016) 321–37. Keith develops this argument in C. Keith, *The Gospel as Manuscript: An Early History of the Jesus Tradition as Material Artifact* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020) 100–30.

[21] At the same time, discerning authenticity was one of the skills on which such circles prided themselves, while they hurled mockery at those who failed in exercising such discernment; see Johnson, *Readers and Reading Culture*, 89, 167–8; Peirano, *Roman Fake,* 55; J. A. Howley, *Aulus Gellius and Roman Reading Culture: Text, Presence, and Imperial Knowledge in the* Noctes Atticae (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018) 221–5.

[22] Pliny, *Ep.* 1.1.1. Pliny claims that he organised the material at random, a statement of which classicists are rightly sceptical. On Pliny's exploitation of invisible workers, see S. Blake, 'Now You See Them: Slaves and Other Objects as Elements of the Roman Master', *Helios* 39 (2012) 193–211; S. Blake, '*In Manus:* Pliny's *Letters* and the Arts

history shows, enslaved or formerly enslaved literary workers were often presented as the *manus* or 'hand' of the Author. This transfiguration, which drew upon broader ideas about enslaved or subservient family members as extensions of the *paterfamilias*, means that such figures are often absent from our sources.[23]

An examination of literary sources reveals that servile workers were in every stage of writing, taking dictation, editing drafts, collating documents, excerpting and supplementing texts. Textual production was far from the tidy, self-contained affair we imagine it to have been.[24] As recent work on shorthand has revealed, it was an interactive process that involved translating the spoken word into a symbolic vocabulary that was subsequently rendered into longhand.[25] So, too, the multi-stage revision of drafts often fell to others who might clean up the words of the named Author. Authorial work spills out of the elite study and into the workshops where texts were revised, copied and manufactured by banausic workers who were often enslaved or formerly enslaved.[26] It was often in bookshops that titles (both accurate and inaccurate) were attached to texts. In these spaces and in the aftermath of initial composition, texts continued to be revised by individuals who were artisans by trade and low status by reputation.

What is true of Roman elites from one famous family is true of many others, including Christ-followers. Early Christian writing, as the letters of Paul and Ignatius reveal, was collaborative rather than monographic.[27] Papias pictures the evangelist Mark as a secretarial figure who was responsible for passing on the words of the apostle Peter (*Hist. eccl.* 3.39.15).[28] Luminaries like Origen are well known for their suite of enslaved notaries, readers and calligraphers (*Hist. eccl.* 6.23). Though only a few collaborators are mentioned by name, early Christian writing was not monographic. That Jesus-followers and early Christians had the resources to employ secretaries might surprise some. Yet although most of the literary evidence for the use of literate workers comes from the rarefied air of elite circles, studies of ancient commerce and administration reveal that enslaved literate workers were involved in drafting legal documents and performing the calculations essential to mercantile exchange and bookkeeping.[29] Some enslaved literate workers

of Mastery', in *Roman Literary Cultures: Domestic Politics, Revolutionary Poetics, Civic Spectacle* (ed. A. Keith and J. Edmondson; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016) 89–107; Howley, *Aulus Gellius*, 112–56.

[23] B. Reay, 'Agriculture, Writing, and Cato's Aristocratic Self-Fashioning', *CA* 24 (2005) 331–61; J. Bodel, 'Villaculture', in *Roman Republican Villas: Architecture, Context, and Ideology* (ed. J. A. Becker and N. Terrenato; Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012) 45–60, at 51.

[24] In the aftermath of composition, as Najman and Peirano note, an 'editor can in effect reauthor an anonymous poem, turn imitation into a forgery, and even construct a narrative by juxtaposing texts originally unrelated to each other', 'Pseudepigraphy', 333. See also King, 'What is an Author?' and Geue, *Author Unknown*.

[25] Moss, 'Secretary'.

[26] Attested freedperson bookshop owners included Secundus, the freedman of Lucensis (Martial 1.2.7). Of the seven identifiable booksellers in the city of Rome, four have Greek names (Atrectus [Martial 1.117.13], Sextus Peducaeus Dionysius [*CIL* 6.9218], Dorus [Seneca, *Ben.* 7.6.1], and Trypho [Martial 4.72.2; 13.3.4]), a detail that has led several readers to conclude that they were formerly enslaved. See, for example, N. Brockmeyer, 'Die soziale Stellung der "Buchhändler" in der Antike', *Archiv für Geschichte des Buchwesens* 13 (1973) 237–48; P. White, 'Bookshops in the Literary Culture of Rome', in *Ancient Literacies: The Culture of Reading in Greece and Rome* (ed. W. A. Johnson; Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2009) 268–86; M. C. Nicholls, '"Bookish Spaces" in Imperial Rome: Bookshops and the Urban Landscape of Learning', *Scholastic Culture in the Hellenistic and Roman Eras: Greek, Latin, and Jewish* (ed. S. A. Adams; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019) 51–68; R. J. Starr, 'The Circulation of Literary Texts in the Roman World', *CQ* 37 (1987) 213–23.

[27] On collaboration, see, e.g., Richards, *The Secretary in the Letters of Paul*; Moss, 'Secretary'; Baum, 'Content and Form'.

[28] C. R. Moss, 'Fashioning Mark'.

[29] See, for example, Nardus the enslaved secretary of P. Annius Seleucus, an illiterate warehouse owner (TPSulp. 53 [13 March 40 C.E.]), or Cleon, an enslaved (likely North African) secretary who was jointly 'owned' by a consortium of salt farmers (*CIL* 12 2226). For the relevance of joint ownership to Onesimus' situation, see

were jointly owned by groups or multiple individuals. In situations in which low-status or illiterate people dictated letters, we find that hired workers did intervene in, influence and improve the style of those compositions.[30]

What this survey reveals, then, is that a variety of different actors were involved in the composition of ancient texts. Monographic writing should not be assumed when it comes to the writing of early Christian literature. Given that many early Christian texts, including those in the New Testament, reveal themselves to be the product of collaboration, we must reconsider what it meant to 'forge' a text for early Christians.[31] Given the frequency with which low-status individuals wrote in the names of higher-status enslavers, the definition of forgery cannot simply be 'writing in the name of someone else'.[32]

There were instances, however, when writing in the names of others was regarded as illicit. While the problem with those texts might be their failure or perceived failure to authentically or to adequately express the will of the named Author, it is worth considering the classed terms in which they are delegitimised.[33] Illicit writing ('fakes' and 'forgeries') was rhetorically exiled as 'illegitimate', 'fabricated' and otherwise low status.[34] We turn to the characterisation of this kind of writing among early Christians. We begin with 'textual meddling'; that is, the illicit editing, reshaping and alteration of previously authored and already authoritative traditions.[35] The concern was not the authoring of new material but rather the low-status character of textual alteration involving artisanal spaces and banausic hands.[36]

U. Roth, 'Paul, Philemon, and Onesimus', *ZNW* 105 (2014) 102–30. For joint ownership by Jewish enslavers, see C. Hezser, *Jewish Slavery in Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) 290. For further discussion, see C. Moss, *God's Ghostwriters: Enslaved Christians and the Making of the Bible* (New York: Little, Brown, 2024) 221–2 and notes.

[30] See P.Oxy 6.932, an example of a woman dictating to a secretary, with discussion in R. Bagnall and R. Cribiore, *Women's Letters from Ancient Egypt, 300 BC–AD 800* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2000) 62. They note: 'While the handwriting is clear, smooth, and even elegant, the scribe seems to have given up on the attempt to improve on the abrupt commands of Thais.'

[31] As Moss writes, 'For enslaved secretaries [or, we might add, other textual producers] who could not produce legal biological offspring, was authorial status something to which they could aspire? Moreover, what does it mean to accuse an enslaved secretary of forgery when they spent most of their time writing in the name of another and were not empowered to write in their own name?', 'Secretary', n. 100.

[32] One did not need to be an enslaver to benefit from the labour of enslaved literary experts whose services might be rented from or 'volunteered' by others.

[33] For some scholars, what matters is not whether Paul wrote his letters but whether he authorised them. See, for example, L. T. Johnson, *Constructing Paul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020) 72. Ancient enslavers would have agreed, but we should note that the ability to 'authorise' something should not be confused with labour nor should it be divorced by the social structures that grant certain individuals the power to claim ownership and authority over texts.

[34] In discussions of Secret Mark, people also use the language of 'hoax' to imply a comedic forgery. See S. Carlson, *The Gospel Hoax: Morton Smith's Invention of Secret Mark* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2005) and discussion in G. S. Smith and B. C. Landau, *The Secret Gospel of Mark: A Controversial Scholar, a Scandalous Gospel of Jesus, and the Fierce Debate over its Authenticity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2023) 92–5, 123.

[35] On the polemical category of 'textual meddling', see further J. Coogan, 'Meddling with the Gospel: Celsus, Early Christian Textuality, and the Politics of Reading', *NovT* 65 (2023) 400–22.

[36] Post-authorial textual interventions were not always illicit. Texts needed editing, manuscripts demanded correction, and published works required maintenance. In the early third century, the jurist Ulpian includes correcting among the non-authorial tasks of book manufacture (*Dig.* 32.52.5). The task of manufacture also included shaping, hammering, ornamenting, gluing, polishing and correcting texts. On polishing, see Phaedrus, *Fab.* 1 pr. and Lucian *Ind.* 16. Cf. Coogan, Moss, and Howley, 'Socioeconomics of Fabrication'; B. Nongbri, 'Maintenance', in *Writing, Enslavement, and Power in the Roman Mediterranean* (ed. J. Coogan, J. A. Howley, and C. R. Moss; New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming); T. Kearey, 'Editing', in *Writing, Enslavement, and Power in the Roman Mediterranean*. Even reading was an interpretative form of curation that had to preserve (and produce) the meaning of Christian texts. The question, then, is how illicit forms of post-compositional activity were characterised.

4. Textual Meddling

The problem of textual meddling loomed large in the imaginations of literate Christians, just as it did for other Roman intellectuals in the Roman Mediterranean.[37] Elite ideologies of authorship maintained that textual correction was a paideutic skill; only the properly formed 'man of letters' could discern inauthentic words, phrases and works.[38] Proper 'editing' then comes to require the same cultural standing as is required for 'authorship'. In practice, however, a great deal of textual conservation occurred in bookshops and other artisanal spaces.[39] In these low-status contexts, texts were repaired, reinked, corrected and reassembled.[40] Yet, artisanal spaces, outside the sightlines of elite surveillance, were also imagined as sites for the production of textual error.[41] Early Christian polemics deploy these broader discursive frameworks around authorship and authenticity.

Marcion of Sinope remains early Christianity's most notorious textual meddler.[42] Marcion's editorial project was grounded in the conviction that authentic Pauline texts had been interpolated by earlier readers who – in Marcion's opinion – had misunderstood Paul's views on circumcision and on the relationship between the Creator and the Christian God.[43] Through his collection of Pauline letters and a Gospel resembling Luke,

[37] See, for example, Tertullian, *Praescr.* 38; Origen, *Cels.* 2.27. Both Tertullian and Origen assert that while heretics may meddle with the scriptures, orthodox Christians do not. On early Christian accusations of textual meddling (often in the context of heresiological debates), see B. D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christian Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993 (2011^2)); K. Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians of Letters: Literacy, Power, and the Transmitters of Early Christian Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2000) 37–8, 111–13; Peter W. Martens, *Origen and Scripture: The Contours of the Exegetical Life* (Oxford Early Christian Studies; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) 107–32; Jennifer Wright Knust and Tommy Wassermann, *To Cast the First Stone: The Transmission of a Gospel Story* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019) 47–94 and 114–15. On Christian discourse in the context of Roman 'politics of reading' see Coogan, 'Meddling with the Gospel'.

[38] Our reference to the 'man of letters' alludes to Galen, *Libr. prop.* 1 (Kühn 19.8), discussed below. See further Johnson, *Readers and Reading Culture*, 114–15; Howley, 'Forgery Beyond Deceit'; Coogan, 'Meddling with the Gospel', 407–12.

[39] See the essays of Kearey ('Editing'), Nongbri ('Maintenance') and Schultz ('Collection') in *Writing, Enslavement, and Power in the Roman Mediterranean* (ed. J. Coogan, J. A. Howley, and C. R. Moss; New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

[40] For examples of textual production, maintenance and sale as banausic and 'non-authorial' activities frequently performed in low-status locations, see Cicero, *Att.* 4.4; Seneca, *Ep.* 15.6; 90.25–7; Dio Chrys. 21.12; Gellius, *NA* 2.3.5; 5.4.1; Galen, *Libr. prop.* 1–2 (19.8–9 Kühn); *Hipp. epid. III* 17a.524–8, 558–61, 600–13, 617–25, 631–4, 731, 751, 765–6 Kühn = CMG 5.10.2.1 (Wenkebach); Lucian, *Ind.* 1–2, 4–5, 16; *Alex.* 21–2; Ulpian at *Dig.* 32.52.5. Cf. Coogan, Moss, and Howley, 'Socioeconomics of Fabrication', which discusses these and other examples.

Throughout the Roman Mediterranean, we find an expansive body of evidence reflecting the labour and expertise of enslaved literary workers in every stage of textual activity, including reading, writing, revising, collection management, physical manufacture and repair. See *inter multa alia* Cicero, *Att.* 4.4; *QFr.* 3.1.1, 10; *Fam.* 16.17.1; 16.22.1; Seneca, *Ep.* 15.6; Quintilian, *Inst.* 1.pr.7–8; 4.1.69; 10.7.30–3; 10.1.128; Pliny, *Ep.* 3.5; 6.2.1.7; Petronius, *Sat.* 68; Gellius, *NA* 1.7.1; 13.21.16; Galen, *Aff. pecc. dig.* 5.48 Kühn; Apuleius, *Apol.* 80.

[41] On the centrality of sightlines and surveillance to Roman practices of enslaving, see S. R. Joshel, 'Geographies of Slave Containment and Movement' in *Roman Slavery and Roman Material Culture* (ed. M. George; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013) 99–123. The anxieties of Rome's enslaving and authoring class about knowledge production beyond the surveilling gaze exert an enormous pressure on the literary culture of the Roman Mediterranean.

[42] On Marcion's life and thought, see, e.g., H. Räisänen, 'Marcion' in *A Companion to Second-Century Christian 'Heretics'* (ed. A. S. Marjanen and P. Luomanen; Brill: Leiden, 2008) 100–24; cf. J. Lieu, *Marcion and the Making of a Heretic: God and Scripture in the Second Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), esp. 293–322.

[43] Tert., *Marc.* 5.20.1–2. In Marcion's reading, the false brethren referred to by Paul in Gal 2.4–5 had perverted the Gospel. Marcion read this situation into several other passages (Gal 1.6–9; 2 Cor 11.13–14; 2 Cor 12.2–7) including, most notably, Paul's rebuke of Peter in Gal 2.14. For an elegant attempt to reconstruct Marcion's

Marcion claimed to recover this unadulterated truth.[44] Given Marcion's concerns about damaged texts, it is ironic that his opponents criticised him for inflicting precisely the same sort of textual harm. In the Roman Mediterranean, many complaints about fraudulent textual production centre on the improper manufacture of 'new' material. Yet, attacks on Marcion focused instead on how he had mangled existing texts authored by Paul and Luke.[45] Irenaeus ironically compares Marcion's textual labours to the physical violence of 'circumcising' (*circumcidens*, *Haer*. 1.27.2) Luke's Gospel.[46] Convincing his disciples that he is more truthful (*ueraciorem*) than 'those apostles who have handed down the Gospel to us' (*qui Euangelium tradiderunt apostoli*), Marcion transmits to his disciples 'not Gospel, but merely a fragment of Gospel' (*non Euangelium, sed particulam Euangelii*, *Haer*. 1.27.2). Likewise, Marcion 'dismembers' the letters of Paul (*abscidit, Haer*. 1.27.2). Tertullian objects – rather more succinctly – that Marcion has shamelessly 'used the knife, not the stylus' (*machaera, non stilo usus est*, *Praescr.* 38.9).[47] Marcion is not an Author at all, just a fraudulent craftsman. For Marcion's critics, illicit textual intervention is part of an even more noxious meddling: the fabrication of a made-up deity. For Irenaeus, there is an irony in Marcion's theology; he rejects association with the 'Demiurge', the cosmic fabricator, but is a merchant and a textual fabricator himself.[48]

Marcion's critics also employ a second line of attack, focused on his profession as a maritime merchant (ναύτης).[49] For these critics, Marcion becomes a textual pirate; he

interpretation, see E. Norelli, 'Marcione lettore dell' epistola ai romani', *Cristianesimo nella storia* 15 (1994) 635–75; cf. Lieu, *Marcion and the Making of a Heretic*, 234–48. Both Marcion's position and his interventions into the text must be inferred from the writings of his critics.

[44] Reconstructing the nature and extent of Marcion's own textual interventions is difficult although, as Knust and Wasserman write, 'Marcion clearly did engage in some kind of editorial activity' (*To Cast the First Stone*, 109). On Marcion's editorial efforts, see U. Schmid, *Marcion und sein Apostolos: Rekonstruktion und historische Einordnung der marcionitischen Paulusbriefausgabe* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1995); Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians*, 37–8, 111–13; D. T. Roth, *The Text of Marcion's Gospel* (Leiden: Brill, 2015); Lieu, *Marcion and the Making of a Heretic*, 183–269; Knust and Wassermann, *To Cast the First Stone*, 105–15.

[45] E.g., Iren., *Haer.* 1.27.2; 3.11.7; 3.12.12; 3.14.4; Tert., *Marc.* 1.1.5; 4.2.4. Cf. C. Keith, 'The Gospel Read, Sliced, and Burned: The Material Gospel and the Construction of Christian Identity', *EC* 12 (2021) 1–21; J. Coogan, *Eusebius the Evangelist: Rewriting the Fourfold Gospel in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023) 77. 'What Pontic mouse', Tertullian asks, 'is more corrosive than the man who has gnawed away at the Gospels?' (*Marc*. 1.1.5). Tertullian is not the only one to employ such invective. Lucian mocks his ignorant Syrian book collector in similar terms: Because the man fails to use his books properly, 'What else is he doing but buying haunts for mice and lodgings for worms, and excuses to thrash his servants for negligence?' (Lucian, *Ind*. 17: LCL 130: 195, ed. and trans. Harmon). On how ancient elites deployed polemics about 'nibbling at' texts against grammarians and other lower-status literate workers, see C. Lambert, 'The Ancient Entomological Bookworm', *Arethusa* 53 (2020) 1–24.

[46] For the text of Irenaeus, here extant only in late ancient Latin translation, we use the edition of A. Rousseau and L. Doutreleau, *SC* 264: 350–1. As Knust and Wassermann note (pp. 114–15) self-interested theological editing would come to be associated both with Jews and with Marcion. The most famous example is the accusation that Jews had excised an alleged passage in Psalm 95.10 referring to the crucifixion (Justin, *Dial.* 73–5; Tertullian, *Adv. Jud.* 10.11). Origen makes similar accusations in *Ep. Afr.* 8–9, 13 (*Philocalie, 1–20: Sur les écritures et la lettre à Africanus sur l'histoire de Suzanne* (ed. M. Harl and N.R.M. de Lange; Paris: Cerf, 1983) 532–5, 544–5). Compare descriptions of 'Jewish' textual meddling in connection with the 'Gospel according to the Hebrews', discussed in J. Coogan, 'The Ways that Parted in the Library: The Gospels *according to Matthew* and *according to the Hebrews* in Late Ancient Heresiology', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 74 (2023): 473–90, esp. 480–1 and 487–8.

[47] For the text of Tertullian, we use the edition of R. Refoulé, *CCSL* 1. Cf. Origen, *Comm. Rom.* 10.43.2, preserved in Rufinus' fourth-century translation. Tertullian's hyperbole was taken up by nineteenth-century scholars, but more recent analyses indicate that Marcion's rewriting involved more than just excision; see D. T. Roth, 'Marcion's Gospel and Luke: The History of Research in Current Debate', *JBL* 127 (2008) 513–27.

[48] See Irenaeus, *Haer*. 3.12.12; 4.6.4; cf. (Ps-)Hippolytus, *Haer*. 7.30.2. Tertullian describes Marcion as 'crafting' or 'moulding' his disciple Apelles (*Praescr*. 30.5).

[49] On Marcion as a maritime merchant, see Euseb., *Hist. eccl*. 5.13.3 (citing the late second-century figure Rhodon, purportedly a student of Tatian); Tert., *Marc*. 4.9; *Praescr*. 30.1; cf. G. May, 'Der "Schiffsreeder" Markion', *Studia Patristica* 21 (1989) 142–53.

has kidnapped (*plagiatur*, Tert., *Marc.* 1.23) and physically violated (Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.27.2; Ps-Tertullian, *Haer.* 6) the texts of the apostle Paul and the evangelists. Similarly, an anonymous third-century treatise characterises Marcion as a theological smuggler. He has 'plundered' (συλαγωγῶν) the philosophical ideas of Empedocles and 'secretly smuggled' (λανθάνειν ὑπελάμβανε) them to Rome from Sicily.[50] He introduces these ideas (μεταφέρων) into the Gospel text word-for-word (εἰς τοὺς εὐαγγελικοὺς λόγους μεταφέρων αὐταῖς λέξεσι).[51] These accusations trade in broader ancient stereotypes about the corrupting dangers of commercial spaces. As Marcion's rough contemporary Galen implied, texts in shipping warehouses were liable to be mislabelled and tampered with.[52] Doubly marked by his mercantile profession and barbarian origins, Marcion is presented as someone who could neither author nor edit appropriately.[53]

Some Christian intellectuals also disparaged the textual practices of their rivals by associating them with banausic professions and activities. Consider the descriptions of a reading circle centred on Theodotus of Byzantium, a second-century cobbler in Rome.[54] Our main source for the textual practices of Theodotus and his coterie is a series of excerpts preserved by Eusebius of Caesarea in his *Ecclesiastical History*; most scholars conclude that these excerpts derive from an anonymous third-century work known as the *Little Labyrinth*.[55] The excerpts conveyed by Eusebius reflect classed polemic

[50] The philosopher Empedocles (fifth century BCE) came from Sicily, but the reputation of the island was also linked to piracy and smuggling. On the association of Sicily with piracy, see D. Jolowicz, 'Sicily and Roman Republican History in Chariton's *Chaereas and Callirhoe*', *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 138 (2018) 127–49.

[51] (Ps-)Hippolytus, *Haer.* 7.30.1 (ed. D. Litwa, WGRW 40; Atlanta: SBL, 2015) 556–9. The term μεταφέρων can describe both physical transport of objects and the transposition and translation of text; (Ps-)Hippolytus exploits this range of meanings for polemical effect. (Ps-)Hippolytus continues this polemic in *Haer.* 7.30.2–3.

[52] In his discussion of the mysterious marks (χαρακτῆρες) that appeared in manuscripts of Hippocrates' *Epidemics*, Galen implies that it was in the warehouses of the port of Alexandria that these marks – much like ordinary receipt marks – were added to the manuscripts. For Galen's discussion of the marks and their origins see *Hipp. epid. III* 17a.524–8, 558–61, 600–13, 617–25, 631–4, 731, 751, 765–66 Kühn = CMG 5.10.2.1. Cf. H. von Staden, 'Staging the Past, Staging Oneself: Galen on Hellenistic Exegetical Traditions' in *Galen and the World of Knowledge* (ed. C. Gill, T. Whitmarsh, and J. Wilkins; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) 144–50; S. Johnstone, 'A New History of Libraries and Books in the Hellenistic Period', *Classical Antiquity* 33 (2014) 347–93; E. D. Nelson, 'Rereading Galen and Zeuxis on Ptolemy's Port: Hippocratic Anonymity and Literary Malpractice', *Mnemosyne: A Journal of Classical Studies* 63 (2015) 437–51; J. Coogan, 'Meddling with the Gospel', 410–11; Coogan, Moss, and Howley, 'Socioeconomics of Fabrication'. For examples of receipt marks on amphorae, see J. Bodel, 'The Semiotics of *Signa* and the Significance of Signs in Roman Stamps' in *Hidden Language of Graphic Signs* (ed. J. Bodel and S. Houston; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021) 173–98.

[53] For polemic against Marcion's barbarian origins, see 'the opening passage of Tertullian's *Marc.*, which draws on Herodotus to sketch a portrait of Pontic savagery and environmental and cultural desolation' (Coogan, 'Meddling with the Gospel', 419 n. 47). Negative depictions of Marcion may reflect a broader resentment about wealthy *arrivistes* in the Roman metropole. Compare J. Weisweiler, 'Capital Accumulation, Supply Networks and the Composition of the Roman Senate, 14–235 CE' in *Past & Present* 253 (2021) 3–44, who traces the fluctuating expansion of the senatorial class through *nouveaux riches* from the Roman provinces. Marcion's reported – and perhaps fictional or exaggerated – gift of the enormous sum of 200,000 sesterces (*apud* Tertullian, *Praescr.* 30.2) might suggest this kind of wealth.

[54] On 'the Theodotians', see P. Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus: Christians at Rome in the First Two Centuries* (trans. Michael Steinhauser; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991) 344–8. On Theodotus' social context, see H. G. Snyder, 'Shoemakers and Syllogisms: Theodotus "the Cobbler" And His School' in *Christian Teachers in Second-Century Rome: Schools and Students in the Ancient City* (ed. H. G. Snyder; Leiden: Brill, 2020) 183–204. As students of Theodotus, the *Little Labyrinth* mentions Asclepiades, Hermophilus, Apolloniades, and a second Theodotus (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.28.9, 17).

[55] Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.28.3–6, 8–12, 13–19. We cite Eusebius from the edition of Schwartz and Mommsen (GCS Eusebius Werke II.1–3). The title (ὁ σμικρὸς [...] Λαβύρινθος) is first attested in the fifth century by Theodoret of Cyrus, *Haereticarum fabularum compendium* 1.5.2 (ed. B. Gleede, GCS N.F. 26:112=PG 83:392). Theodoret suggests, without confidence, that the treatise might have been written by Origen. Modern scholars often attribute it

about who has the education and status to engage in authoring a text or authorising a revision.[56]

The heresiological invective against Theodotus and his followers is articulated in terms of education, social status and labour. Theodotus himself is a 'cobbler' (σκυτεύς), hardly a proper profession for a Roman intellectual – although an occupation marked by spatial proximity to Rome's book trade.[57] Despite their dabbling in logic, geometry, medicine and philology, the group lacks proper intellectual formation (παιδεία).[58] Their attempts at theological reasoning are described in artisanal terms as τέχναι (5.28.15).

Theodotus and his circle claim to have corrected the scriptures, but the *Little Labyrinth* disparages them for acting 'recklessly' (ἀφόβως, *Hist. eccl.* 5.28.13, 15) and 'tampering' with the texts (ῥεῤαδιουργήκασιν, *Hist. eccl.* 5.28.13).[59] This language of reckless meddling carries connotations of the slapdash work that elites assumed low-status workers might perform out of their sight; both terms reflect elite polemics against those who lack παιδεία.[60] Theodotus and his circle of failed intellectuals perform the work of fraudulent textual production with their own hands; repeated mention of the 'hand' emphasises the manual nature of this labour (*Hist. eccl.* 5.28.15: ἐπέβαλον τὰς χεῖρας; 5.28.18: τῇ αὐτῶν χειρὶ ᾗ γεγραμμένα), evoking the connotations of low-status artisanal bookwork. Theodotus' circle are doing the work of a scribe or copyist – and doing it badly.

The *Little Labyrinth* compares the group's textual practices with other low-status and ethically suspect occupations as well, evoking a pharmacological idiom. Theodotus and company are accused of using artisanal skills (ταῖς [...] τέχναις [...] ἀποχρώμενοι) to taint the 'pure' (ἁπλῆν) faith 'by trickery' (πανουργίᾳ) in order to offer it for sale (καπηλεύοντες, *Hist. eccl.* 5.28.15).[61] Later, their actions are described as 'debasing' (παραχαράσσειν, *Hist. eccl.* 5.28.19) the text, an idiom that often describes debasing

to Hippolytus of Rome. The best discussion of the problems surrounding the authorship and date of the *Little Labyrinth* is J. T. Fitzgerald, 'Eusebius and *The Little Labyrinth*', in *The Early Church in Its Context: Essays in Honor of Everett Ferguson* (ed. A. J. Malherbe, F. W. Norris, and J. W. Thompson; Leiden: Brill, 1998) 120–46.

[56] This text has occasionally been discussed in modern scholarship on authorship, pseudepigraphy and authenticity. Most importantly, Bart Ehrman has discussed it as an example of heresiological polemic. Yet, while recognising that accusations of textual meddling are a commonplace of Christian heresiological invective, Ehrman does not observe the classed dimensions of these accusations or how they reflect wider conflict over παιδεία, authority and status among elites and intellectuals in the Roman Mediterranean, beyond Christian figures and groups. See B. Ehrman, 'The Theodotians as Corruptors of Scripture', *Studia Patristica* 9 (1992) 46–51; reprinted in *Studies in the Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (ed. B. D. Ehrman; Leiden: Brill, 2006) 300–6. On failed textual intervention as a theme in other polemics in the Roman Mediterranean, see J. Coogan, 'Meddling with the Gospel', 407–12.

[57] Theodotus is described as a cobbler in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.28.6, 9 (both times in quotations from the *Little Labyrinth*). The second-century intellectual Galen states 'most of the booksellers in Rome' (πλεῖστα τῶν ἐν Ῥώμῃ βιβλιοπωλείων, *Libr. prop.* 1 = Kühn 19.8) conducted their business in the Sandaliarius district. This spatial juxtaposition of the book trade with the artisanal work of cobbling is also supported by Gellius, *NA* 18.4.1. Cf. discussion in Coogan, Moss, and Howley, 'Socioeconomics of Fabrication'. Cobblers were adjacent to literate work in other ways as well. Beyond the ties between workshops and industries, several inscriptions from Pompeii made by professional sign painters Secundus and Victor mention Vesbinus, a cobbler (*CIL* 4.1190b; 4.636).

[58] Logic and geometry: *Hist. eccl.* 5.28.13–14; medicine: *Hist. eccl.* 5.28.14; philology: *Hist. eccl.* 5.28.13, 15–19. On their lack of critical discernment (συγκρῖναι), see *Hist. eccl.* 5.28.17 with discussion in Coogan, 'Meddling with the Gospel', 420.

[59] For example, they have 'applied their hands recklessly to the divine writings, claiming to correct them' (ταῖς θείαις γραφαῖς ἀφόβως ἐπέβαλον τὰς χεῖρας, λέγοντες αὐτὰς διωρθωκέναι, *Hist. eccl.* 5.28.15).

[60] On broader polemics against textual meddling, see Coogan, 'Meddling with the Gospel', esp. 407–12.

[61] On the fraudulent practice of 'cutting' drugs or other ingredients, compare Galen's discussion in *De Theriaca ad Pisonem* of how to test for adulterated theriacs. Similar practices may be in view with the *Little Labyrinth*'s accusation that the followers of Theodotus 'erase' or 'obscure' (ἠφανισμένα, 5.28.17) the texts; the word can describe both textual erasure and hiding or making away with other objects.

currency (a capital crime).[62] This invective against textual malpractice evokes corrupt concocting, analogous to the apothecary practices of charlatan hacks or the fraud of those who devalue coinage.[63]

Classed pagan polemics against early Christian artisanal figures offer yet another, more pointed example. The second-century philosopher Celsus exploited the association of craftsmanship with inauthenticity to accuse[64] Jesus of Nazareth himself of fabricating (πλασμαμένου) the story of the virgin birth (*Cels.* 1.28).[65] Celsus complains that Jesus the day-labourer fabricated stories as well as objects.[66] Celsus objects that Christians are low-status and banausic figures – and Jesus, too, was a mere craftsman (τέκτων, Mark 6.3; cf. Matt 13.55) who performed sleight-of-hand marketplace tricks learned in Egypt. For Celsus, the tools and training of the artisan lead one to cobble and plaster. Craftsmen who attempt serious intellectual work are still 'crafty' in both meanings of that word. Could one expect anything else? Celsus remains ambivalent about whether the things reported about Jesus are just Jesus' own self-fashioning or whether the gullible people who witnessed the fabrication continued to add additional layers of embellishment to the story.

In his response to Celsus, Origen asserts that the Gospels are not fabrications or πλάσματα (*Cels*. 2.58; 3.27). Nor do 'real' Christians drunkenly produce numerous contradictory versions of the Gospel – contrary to Celsus' erroneous assertions. That kind of textual alteration, Origen writes, was only performed by 'heretical' readers like Marcion, Valentinus and Lucan (*Cels.* 2.27).[67] In Origen's opinion, Celsus is himself a poor reader. In deploying this defence, Origen deploys the same cultural biases and anti-banausic rhetorical tropes as his pagan intellectual peers like Celsus, Galen and Gellius. Though Origen and Celsus disagree both on the character of the Gospel and its textual stability, they agree that textual instability and mischaracterisation are features of poorly educated readers.[68]

[62] As observed in Coogan, 'Meddling with the Gospel', 420, 'The language of παραχαράσσειν (5.28.18), which refers to forging or debasing currency, may be a less-than-subtle dig at the moneychanger Theodotus'.

[63] The pharmaceutical idiom resonates with the mocking statement, directly prior, that that the group 'marvel at Aristotle and Theophrastus' and 'probably kneel in veneration of Galen' (*Hist. eccl.* 5.28.14). On the medical pursuits of Theodotus' circle, see J. Secord, 'Galen and the Theodotians: Embryology and Adoptionism in the Christian Schools of Rome', *Studia Patristica* 81 (2017) 51–63.

[64] Celsus lodges this accusation via a surrogate character. Debates persist about whether this prosopographic Jew is a 'real' figure; e.g., M. Niehoff, 'A Jewish Critique of Christianity from Second-Century Alexandria: Revisiting the Jew Mentioned in *Contra Celsum*', *JECS* 21 (2013) 151–75; J. N. Carleton Paget 'The Jew of Celsus and *adversus Judaeos* Literature', *ZAC* 21 (2017) 201–42; *Celsus in His World: Philosophy, Polemic and Religion in the Second Century* (ed. J. N. Carleton Paget and S. Gathercole, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), especially the essays of Alexander, Carleton Paget, Goodman, and Lieu.

[65] Celsus' writings are preserved only by Origen. As C. Pelling, *Characterization and Individuality in Greek Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990) 219 observes, ancient biographies often embellished or invented childhood stories.

[66] That Celsus connects the professional *habitus* of the craftsman with the act of fabricating narratives conveniently obscures the ancient paedagogical practice that taught elite children to write via imitation. On imitation and self-imitation, see Peirano, *Rhetoric*, esp. p. 83.

[67] See J. Coogan, 'Meddling with the Gospel'.

[68] So Coogan, 'Meddling', 416–18, arguing that Origen accused both Celsus and 'heretics' (the adherents of Marcion, Valentinus and Lucan) of being 'bad readers' and that Celsus himself had accused Christians of the same. Origen composed the *Contra Celsum* quite late in his career and was apparently unfamiliar with Celsus' criticisms of Christianity before Ambrose asked him to write a refutation (cf. J. Carleton Paget and S. Gathercole, 'Introduction', in *Celsus in His World: Philosophy, Polemic and Religion in the Second Century* (ed. J. Carleton Paget and S. Gathercole; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021) 8–9). Yet long before Origen encountered Celsus, he had grappled with the prospect that bad readers might (mis)categorise the Gospels as the wrong kind of literature. In his *Commentary on John*, one of his earliest extant compositions, Origen expresses concern

5. Audacious Mislabelling

Artisanal interventions did not only take place at the level of the copyist or editor. The titling and (mis)categorisation of textual material also took place in workshops and bookstores. This is precisely the scenario envisioned in a famous scene from Galen's *On My Own Books.* As Galen recounts, a man of letters (τις ἀνὴρ τῶν φιλολόγων) was browsing in a Roman bookshop when he encountered a book-roll labelled '*The Doctor* by Galen'.[69] Because of the work's attribution to the famous Galen, a gullible customer has purchased it. But the well-educated man, who has (Galen tells us) been shaped since childhood in grammar and rhetoric, quickly notices that the style of the work (λέξις) fails to match Galen's own. The man proceeds to rip up the fraudulent label. In this scene, the elite skills of παιδεία triumph over the intellectually impoverished efforts of a bookseller to raise the value of his wares. It highlights the messy clash between the artisanal and servile spaces in which books were inscribed, labelled and categorised, on the one hand, and notional elite discernment, on the other.[70]

We observe these same dynamics in early Christian debates about authorship and authenticity. In his treatise *De baptismo*,[71] the Carthaginian orator and lawyer Tertullian describes the production of a popular early Christian novelistic text, the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*.[72] The *Acts* does not claim a specific author for itself. Even so, according to Tertullian, the text was 'inaccurately inscribed':[73]

> Let them understand that, in Asia, the presbyter who fabricated that writing, as if he were building up Paul's fame from his own store, after being exposed and confessing that he had fashioned it from love of Paul,[74] retired from his position. (*Bapt.* 17)[75]

that narratives of Jesus' marvellous deeds – such as the healing of a man born blind, the raising of the dead or similar wondrous actions (ἤ τι τῶν παραδόξων πεποίηκεν) – might be misconstrued as the intellectually ambiguous practice of paradoxography. One must recognise, he argues, that Gospel is a protreptic *logos* for the purpose of faith (*Comm. Jn.* 1.5.27).

[69] Galen, *Libr. prop.* 1–2 (= 19.8–9 Kühn). Text: *Galien, t. I: Introduction générale, Sur l'ordre de ses propres livres, Sur ses propres livres, Que l'excellent médecin est aussi philosophe, texte établi, traduit et annoté* (ed. V. Boudon-Millot; Paris: Les belles lettres, 2007) 134–5. The story fits into a larger genre of bookshop encounter stories in Galen, Gellius, etc., in which a person with παιδεία triumphs over commercial and lower-status individuals.

[70] On fabrications by booksellers, see also Gellius, *NA* 1.7.1; 13.21.16–17, who writes of 'Tironian' Ciceros. An alleged Vergilian autograph of unclear origins was purchased by Fides Optatus in the Sigillaria in Rome (Gellius, *NA* 2.3).

[71] The treatise likely dates between 198 and 203 CE. See T. D. Barnes, *Tertullian: A Historical and Literary Study, Reissued with Corrections and a Postscript* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985) 55.

[72] On the contested legacy of this early Christian text, see G. Dabiri and F. Ruani, ed., *Thecla and Medieval Sainthood: The Acts of Paul and Thecla in Eastern and Western Hagiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), especially the essays of Barrier and Staat.

[73] *Acta Pauli, quae perperam scripta sunt* (17.5). Compare Galen's language: ψευδῶς ἐπιγέγραπται (*Lib. prop.* 1). There is substantial debate about whether Tertullian means that the entirety of the text is fabricated or only the portion cited as evidence for women baptising. Beyond Thecla's self-baptism, there are no references in the text to women baptising others. On this passage, see A. Hilhorst, 'Tertullian on the *Acts of Paul*' in *The Apocryphal Acts of Paul and Thecla* (ed. J. N. Bremmer; Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1996) 150–63; W. Rordorf, 'Tertullien et les Actes de Paul (á propos *de bapt*. 17,5)' in *Lex orandi, lex credendi: Gesammelte Aufsätze zum 60. Geburtstag* (ed. W. Rordorf; Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1993) 475–84.

[74] Compare the idea that the poet is motivated by the desire (*amor*) to praise others (e.g., Ov., *Tr.* 5.12.38–39, with commentary in Peirano, *Rhetoric*, 163).

[75] *Sciant in asia presbyterum qui eam scripturam construxit quasi titulo pauli de suo cumulans conuictum atque confessum id se amore pauli fecisse loco decessisse* (text: *Tertullian's Homily on Baptism* (ed. E. Evans; London: SPCK, 1964) 36). *Sciant* here refers to the *mulierum* mentioned earlier in the passage; cf. Hilhorst, 'Tertullian', 153.

As with many texts about forgeries, modern scholarship on this passage focuses on the question of deceit.[76] Yet while Tertullian disapproves of the presbyter's literary production, he does not invoke the language of deception. (The *Acta* are, as Peirano might say, not *false* but *wrong*.) The text itself is described using the respectable language of *scriptura*, a significant term for Tertullian.[77] Nor is the presbyter presented as a writer of texts, licit or illicit; the language of writing is conspicuously absent. Instead, Tertullian figures the presbyter as engaged in *construction*: He 'fabricates' (*construxit*) and 'fashions' (*fecisse*) the work, attempting to supplement or 'build up' (*cumulans*) Paul's reputation. These artisanal practices of manufacture are inflected in ambivalently bookish terms. Paul's fame is not *gloria* or *fama* but *titulo*, suggesting that the fabricating presbyter has added to the inscription of Paul's renown.[78] At the same time, Tertullian does not condemn the text as a whole: the *Acta Pauli* remain *scriptura*. This posture reflects the general principle that fabrication is additive and superficial, a work of manipulation that – like other forms of material embellishment – might obscure something true.[79]

Considerable academic debate surrounds Tertullian's treatment of the *Acta Pauli*, but we focus on how he illuminates something that elite Roman writers often intentionally obscure: texts are not only composed, but they are also crafted. Tertullian's language of fabrication draws our attention back to the bookstore and to the spaces and technologies of book production. This rhetorical relocation is deliberate: bookstores, as Galen reminds us, are artisanal workshops. They are places where mistakes are made and errors introduced.[80] These rare and strategic glimpses at the materiality of book production – polemical exercises for both Galen and Tertullian – direct us to individuals usually absent in our sources, the enslaved and freedperson workers whose 'handiwork runs through Roman literature like a torrent'.[81] The presbyter, Tertullian implies, is a bookworker and not an *auctor* – and is thus estranged from literature and authorship.

This brief survey of early Christian polemics against textual misconduct reveals a persistent characterisation of illicit textual activity as artisanal and lacking social status. Much of this was at home in elite Roman discourses about education and literary culture. The material interests evidenced in Tertullian reflect a fascination with the tangible qualities of the book, a tendency that is particularly visible among elite Romans under the

[76] See, e.g., E. J. Goodspeed, 'The Acts of Paul and Thecla', *The Biblical World* 17 (1901) 185–90. For a more recent assessment, see M. Frenschkowski, 'Erkannte Pseudepigraphie? Ein Essay über Fiktionalität, Antike und Christentum' in *Pseudepigraphie und Verfasserfiktion in frühchristlichen Briefen* (ed. J. Frey, J. Herzer, M. Janßen, and C. K. Rothschild; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009) 181–232, who views the passage as evidence that 'pseudepigrapha' were problematic for early Christians.

[77] Tertullian uses the term for works that he deems authoritative, but not for his own writings; cf. Tert., *Marc*. 1.1.

[78] Tertullian retains *gloria* as a translation for the biblical δόξα, but *gloria* was used this way even in non-Christian Latin.

[79] For 'rumour' as truth surrounded by fabricated oral material, see Plut., *De garrulitate* 509B; *Rhet. Her*. 12; cf. discussion in G. Guastella, *Word of Mouth*: Fama *and its Personifications in Art and Literature from Ancient Rome to the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017) 75.

[80] Gell., *NA* 5.4. Cf. Strabo 13.1.54; Cic., *QFr*. 3.4.5; 3.5.6; Martial 2.8. For an overview of the Roman bookshop, see P. White, 'Bookshops in the Literary Culture of Rome' in *Ancient Literacies: The Culture of Reading in Greece and Rome* (ed. W. A. Johnson; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) 268–86. Cf. Starr, 'Circulation', who takes a minimalist view of the role of bookshops in the circulation of Roman books.

[81] S. A. Frampton, *Empire of Letters: Writing in Roman Literature and Thought from Lucretius to Ovid* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019) 6.

Antonine and Severan emperors.[82] But Christian polemic similarly draws upon broader elite concerns about the activities that took place in artisanal and banausic spaces under the auspices of 'servile' freedperson control.[83]

6. Conclusion

The question throughout this article is not 'Was forging texts morally and socially acceptable for ancient Christians?' but, rather, 'How did early Christian conversations about pseudepigraphy participate in broader socioeconomically charged discourses about fabrication?' As we have observed, early Christian discourses about illicit writing and unsanctioned editorial activity participated in wider rhetorical strategies that used class and space to delegitimise specific texts and actors. Ancient discourses of authenticity and authorship were not simply about who produced texts but about policing which acts of textual production counted as 'authoring'. The discourse of artisanal fabrication delegitimised the textual productions of some people by associating them with non-authorial skills and non-elite spaces, even as it also created and reinforced the kinds of authorial claims that anchored 'genuine' texts.

While this article has focused on one thread of delegitimising polemic, the classed and spatially delineated imaginary of early Christian discourse intersects with other ancient conversations about legitimacy. The language of legal legitimacy (νόθος, *ignotus*, often used to describe an illegitimate child) weaponised against some ancient texts was similarly entangled with social hierarchy. It is worth stating the obvious: in wealthy households, many enslaved workers were the biological (but non-marital) offspring of the *paterfamilias*. They may not have had legal status, but even to ancient Romans, such enslaved children were still children and biological offspring.[84] This underscores our point: the discourse of (textual) fabrication and forgery is not about truth but about status and power.

The discourse of artisanal fabrication and the model of singular authorship it seeks to protect should be juxtaposed with the realities of bookwork in the Roman Mediterranean, both for Christians and their contemporaries. The academic conversation about early Christian forgery has often absorbed and reproduced the enslaving logics of ancient authorial discourses as if these were evidence of the realities of ancient writing.[85] Yet the (ancient and often modern) insistence upon monographic, punctiliar authorship obscures the more complicated realities of how books come to be, and especially the contributions of uncredited low-status workers. Authorial and editorial work took place in libraries, bookshops and the servile spaces used by copyists, and it was performed by notaries, secretaries and copyists. These activities and actors are invisible because of

[82] Cf K. ní Mheallaigh, *Reading Fiction with Lucian: Fakes, Freaks, and Hyperreality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); T. Geue, 'Keeping/Losing Records, Keeping/Losing Faith: Suetonius and Justin Do the Document' in *Literature and Culture in the Roman Empire, 96–235: Cross-Cultural Interactions* (ed. A. König, R. Langlands, and J. Uden; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020) 203–22.

[83] Fears about artisanal gatherings and spaces are evident from the many imperial (and even late Republican) attempts to limit *collegia* and voluntary associations. The civic engagement of formerly enslaved people caused Cicero to worry that the freeborn would become 'subject to their slaves' (Cic. *Mil.* 87). This worry generated a discourse of authenticity around the political interests of the enslaved and formerly enslaved. Cicero worried that their actions and votes did not truly represent the will of the people (Cicero, *Sest.* 85). On this, see Sarah Bond, *Strike: Labor, Unions and the Roman Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, forthcoming).

[84] See Najman and Peirano Garrison, 'Pseudepigraphy', 339. For this use of forged books see Ehrman, *Forgery*, 69.

[85] Modern conversations about the distortion of texts, much like ancient discourses about textual meddling, focus on copyists rather than secretaries, notaries or readers. See Moss, 'Secretary', 31–35.

an ancient enslaving ideology that was threatened by and sought both to police and erase non-elite literate work.

Competing interests. The authors declare none.

Cite this article: Coogan J, Moss CR (2024). The Textual Demiurge: Social Status and the Academic Discourse of Early Christian Forgery. *New Testament Studies* **70**, 307–323. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028688523000425