Greetings from Prison and Greetings from Caesar’s House (Philippians 4.22): A Reconsideration of an Enigmatic Greek Expression in the Light of the Context and Setting of Philippians

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Abstract
The Greek expression οἱ ἐκ τῆς Καίσαρος οἰκίας in Phil. 4.22 is unique. Late antique interpreters identified the group with the imperial court or immediate imperial family. In the nineteenth century, however, Ferdinand Christian Baur was skeptical that the historical Paul preached to Nero’s family and therefore counted Philippians among the post-Pauline pseudepigraphical letters. Against this radical historical-critical approach, Joseph Barber Lightfoot and Adolf Deissmann developed their influential hypothesis: οἰκία Καίσαρος ‘represents’ the Latin familia Caesaris – that is, the whole of the imperial household, including all slaves. However, because there is no technical Latin term familia Caesaris in antiquity, οἱ ἐκ τῆς Καίσαρος οἰκίας cannot mean imperial slaves and freedpersons. Instead, I argue that the expression is a spontaneously coined code, a creative metaphor reflecting the conditions of a prisoner in an imperial prison in Ephesus. The saints from the house of Caesar are most likely Paul’s believing co-prisoners.

Keywords
Paul’s imprisonment, ancient prisons, prison writings, history of interpretation, Ephesus

As with most letters of Paul, Philippians concludes with greetings (Phil. 4.21-22). Paul urges his addressees to ‘greet every saint in Jesus Christ’ in order to make
sure that everybody is reached, not only those present when the letter is read aloud (Holloway 2017: 190). He also transmits greetings from ‘the brothers and sisters with him’. If, as seems most likely, Philippians and Philemon were written during the same imprisonment, one can then assume from Phlm. 23-24 that ‘all the brothers and sisters’ include his co-prisoner Epaphras (likely identical with the Epaphroditus who appears in Phil. 2.25-30), Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke. The post-Pauline letter to the Colossians identifies the whole group as Paul’s co-prisoners (Col. 4.10-14). Strikingly, in Philippians Paul gives no names of greeters. The most enigmatic group, however, are ‘all saints, especially those from the house of Caesar’ (Phil. 4.22).

In the following, I will argue that the group of people ‘from the house of Caesar’ are neither members of Claudius’s or Nero’s extensive domus nor administrative personnel in the imperial services but likely some of Paul’s co-prisoners in a public prison in the provincial capital Ephesus. The argument will comprise four steps: First, I will look into the history of research and ask how the earliest known interpreters of Philippians understood the expression οἱ ἐκ τῆς Καίσαρος οἰκίας (‘those from the house of Caesar’). Second, I will demonstrate how current identifications of this group originated in a scholarly dispute on the authenticity of Philippians in the nineteenth century. Third, I will argue that nineteenth-century theories do not concur with ancient terminology. And fourth, I will substantiate my hypothesis by considering the circumstances in which Paul wrote to the Philippians.

Late Antique Commentators on Philippians 4.22

The syntagma οἱ ἐκ τῆς Καίσαρος οἰκίας occurs only in Phil. 4.22. When Greek authors from the time of Paul speak of ἡ οἰκία Καίσαρος, ‘Caesar’s house’, they refer either to his residence or palace or to his immediate family. Inscriptions, for instance, honor Caesars together with their dynastic families. A city on the island of Kos honors a victor in encomium for his songs: ‘to the founder of the city, Augustus, the benefactors, Caesar Tiberius and Caesar Germanicus and their entire household’. In the theater of Hierapolis, one finds a dedication to

1. Paul uses the same formula in 1 Cor. 16.20: ‘All the brothers and sisters send greetings’ (Klauck 1998: 50-52).
2. Epaphras might be a short form of the name Epaphroditus. See: BDAG s.v. Ἐπαφρᾶς; Kiley 1986: 96-97, 131.
3. Caesar’s palace on Mount Palatin: Plutarch, Caes. 63.6; Cic. 28.2; 47.6; etc. Philo documents the second meaning when he asks the rhetorical question: ‘Even if Agrippa had not been a king, yet as a member of Caesar’s household [ἀλλὰ τις τῶν ἐκ τῆς Καίσαρος οἰκίας], did he not deserve to have some precedence and marks of honour?’ (Philo, Flacc. 35; trans. Colson, LCL).
4. IG XII,4 2.939; 4 CE: ζ ζ τον κτίσταν τᾶς πόλιος [ς] Σεβαστον Καίσαρα καὶ τὸ <ς> [ς]ύεργέτας Τεβέ̣[io]ν Καίσαρα κ[α]τ’ Περμανικὸν Καίσαρα καὶ τὸν δον όικον αὐτ[肟]ν.
‘Zeus Olympios, the forefather’s gods and Hadrian with his entire family of Augusti’. At Philippi, some buildings on the forum were dedicated in honorem divina domus, ‘in honor of the divine house’, when the forum was renovated in the second half of the second century CE.

For the first known commentators on Philippians from the fourth century CE onward, ‘those from the house of Caesar’ are either inhabitants of the royal palace or members of the imperial family. For John Chrysostom, the greetings from the house of Caesar, together with those from Erastus, ‘the manager of the city’ (Rom 16.23), indicate that already in Paul’s time the gospel had reached great and powerful people. Paul sent greetings from Caesar’s house to Philippi, he asserts, and thereby ‘pulled them up and strengthened them, demonstrating that his preaching pertained also to the royal household’. And John Chrysostom continues: ‘You see, if those in the palace [οἱ ἐν τοῖς βασιλείοις] despise all earthly things because of the king of heaven, they had to do it much more’. According to Theodoret, Paul teaches ‘how even some royal persons have accepted the divine gospel and led away alive into life some of the household companions of the godless emperor’. And for Athanasius of Alexandria, Phil. 4.22 is an important argument against what was in his opinion the unjustified influence of the emperors at councils of Christian bishops: ‘The Apostle Paul had friends among them of Caesar’s household, and in his Epistle to the Philippians he sent salutations from them; but he never took them as his associates in Ecclesiastical judgments’.

Latin commentaries translate οἱ ἐκ τῆς Καίσαρος οἰκίας as qui de Caesaris domo. In Latin, domus can refer both to the physical house and to a conception

5. SEG 41.1200,1f., 117–138 CE: Διὶ Ὁλυμπίῳ καὶ θεοῖς πατρίοις καὶ Αὐτοκράτορι Καίσα[ρι Τ] Ῥωμαίῳ Ἅδριανῷ Σεβασ[τῷ] καὶ τῷ [σύπαν]τοι οἴκῳ τῶν Σεβαστῶν. Similarly, an association honors the emperor Septimus Severus by a dedication to ‘the health and victory and eternal duration of our Lord emperor Lucius Septimus Severus,… his entire household [τοῦ σύμπαντος οἴκου], and the sacred Senate’ (I.Perinthos 56.4-9). See Kloppenborg and Ascough 2011: no. 87, trans. 393.

6. Brélaz 2014 [CIPh 2.1]: no. 16 = Pilhofer 2009: no. 201; CIPh 2.1 no. 18 = Pilhofer 2009: no. 198; CIPh 2.1 no.19 = Pilhofer 2009: no. 228; CIPh 2.1 no. 21 = Pilhofer 2009: no. 233; CIPh 2.1 no. 22 = Pilhofer 2009: no. 243; see also the dedication to Isis Regina, CIPh 2.1 no. 23 = Pilhofer 2009: no. 132.

7. John Chrysostom, Hom. Rom. 33.3 (PG 60.678,2-3): οἷς καὶ τῶν μεγάλων τὸ κήρυγμα ἡμεῖς ἡμεῖς.

8. John Chrysostom, Hom. Phil. 16.4 (Field-Allen 167/PG 62.294,5-12); trans. Allen 2013.

9. Theodoret, Interpretatio in XIV epistulas sancti Pauli (PG 82.589,31-33). Similarly, in John of Damascus’s (eighth-century) view, Paul comforts them when he argues that the message has grasped even in the royal palace: εἰς τὸν οἶκον τοῦ βασιλικοῦ κεκρατηκέναι … τὸ κήρυγμα (Ad Phil 433.583-85 ((PG 95.881,52f.).)

10. Athanasius, Arian History 52.4: Παῦλος ἀπόστολος ἐβασίλευσεν τοὺς τῆς τοῦ Καίσαρος οἰκίας καὶ γράφων ἡσαύριον τους τῆς τοῦ Καίσαρος οἰκίας καὶ κρίματος ἡσαύριον τοὺς τούς Ἀφροδίτης ἀπὸ τούτων, ἀλλ’ οὐκ εἰς κρίματα τούτους κοινωνίας παρελάμβανε (trans. NPNF2 IV).

11. Theodore of Mopsuestia, Comm. in Phil. 360.29 (Greer).
of family that could include living relatives, ancestors and sometimes slaves and their descendants. Thus ‘the emperor’s relatives of all types constitute the domus Caesarum’ (Saller 1984: 345). For readers in antiquity, however, those who are part of ‘the house of Caesar’ belong to the highest imperial elite, who, if sent to the provinces, are in charge of diplomatic business or supervising central imperial administration. Origen combines Phil. 4.22 with Jn 4.46-51 and argues that ὁ βασιλικός, the royal officer who approaches Jesus to heal his son, was someone from the ‘House of Caesar’ (τῆς Καίσαρος οἰκίας) who had some task to do at that time in the province of Judea (Comm. Jo. 13 §395). According to the popular Acts of Thecla (sometimes attached to Acts of Paul), when Tryphaena, a queen from Caesar’s relatives, seems to have died, the governor and the leaders of the city of Antioch fear punishment. In other words, those who belong to the συγγένεια (family or ‘house’ of Caesar) are even more important than the provincial governor or a city’s famous leading families.

Yet only popular narratives like the Acts of Thecla place Paul’s or Thecla’s missionary success among this highest imperial circle. Some manuscripts of the Acts of Paul include, in addition to the Acts of Thecla, the Martyrdom of Paul, which concludes the composite narrative with the arrival of Paul at Rome.

When Paul saw them [i.e. Luke and Titus] he rejoiced and rented a barn outside Rome in which he was teaching the word of truth with the brothers and sisters. He became famous, and many souls were being added to the Lord, so there was a certain sound going out in Rome. And a great crowd came out to him from the house of Caesar and immediately believed in the word [πολὺ πλῆθος ἐκ τῆς Καίσαρος οἰκίας πιστεύοντας], so that there was a great joy for Paul and those hearing.

Patroclos, a cupbearer of Caesar who fell out of a window and died while Paul was preaching, exemplifies this group of new believers from the household of Caesar. As Michael Flexsenhar has shown convincingly, this story depends both on the Eutychus story from Acts 20.7-12 and on Phil. 4.22. The next popular Christian story counting members from the house of Caesar among the believers is in the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies. In this Christian novel from the fourth century, Clement, a companion of Peter, and his father Faustinus are identified as

12. Acts Paul 4.36. ταῦτα γὰρ ἐὰν ἀκούσῃ ὁ Καῖσαρ, τάχα ἀπολέσει σὺν ἡμῖν καὶ τὴν πόλιν, ὅτι ἡ συγγενῆς αὐτοῦ Τρύφαινα ἡ βασιλίσσα ἀπέθανεν παρὰ τοὺς ἄνδρας.

13. Acts Paul 11.1 = Martyrdom of Paul 1; trans. Eastman 2015: 127.

14. Flexsenhar 2019a: 45-54. Dependent on the Martyrdom of Paul, the Acts of Peter in their fourth-century version (called Actus Vercellenses) expand the list of names: The fictive Paul is bid farewell not only by Cleobius and Iphitus and Lysimachus and Aristeus, all from the house of Caesar (de domo Caesaris), as well as two matrons, Berenice and Philostrate, but also by two noble knights, Dionysos and Balbus from Asia, and a senator called Demetrius (Acts Pet. 3). See Flexsenhar 2019a: 54-59.
relatives of Caesar Tiberius and, accordingly, are rich and powerful.  

Again, this is fiction. Very few historical figures ‘from the house of Caesar’ (ἐκ τῆς Καίσαρος οἰκίας) are likely to have been in some way affiliated with Christianity. One is the rich banker Carpophorus, the slave owner of Callixtus, the later third-century bishop of Rome, according to Hippolytus. Yet it is not Callixtus but his former slave holder who is related to Caesar’s household.

**Philippians 4.22 in Higher or Radical Criticism and its Refutation in the Nineteenth Century**

Modern historical-critical interpretation became more and more skeptical of the idea that some of Paul’s companions could indeed have been members of Caesar’s family and therefore have come from the highest imperial elite. Already in the seventeenth century, Hugo Grotius, in his *Annotationes in Novi Testamenti* (1679: 909, 921), downgraded the group by identifying those from the house of Caesar as *liberti*, freed slaves. In 1831, Heinrich Eberhard Gottlob Paulus argued that this was a group that lived and worked in the *praetorium* in Caesarea, where, in his view, Paul had been imprisoned while writing to the Philippians.

Yet the biggest challenge to all interpreters of the nineteenth century came from Ferdinand Christian Baur (1873–75: II, 58-64). Baur drew on Paul’s success among those from the house of Caesar as implied by Phil. 4.22 as his final argument to prove that Philippians could not have been written by Paul. For Baur, Clement, whom Paul greets in Phil. 4.3, is actually the companion of Peter mentioned in the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies*, where he is presented as a relative of Caesar Tiberius. This Clement could be designed after Flavius Clement, whose female relative Flavia Domitilla is claimed by Eusebius as a Christian.

It was against this radical critical interpretation that Joseph Barber Lightfoot developed his thesis, which has had lasting influence. Lightfoot argued (1896: 171): ‘The “domus” or “familia Caesaris” (represented by the Greek οἰκία Καίσαρος) includes the whole of the imperial household, the meanest slaves as well as the

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15. Ps.-Clem., *Homily* 4.7.2. Clement is ‘a man from the family of Tiberius’ (ἀνὴρ πρὸς γένους Τιβερίου Καίσαρος). See also Ps.-Clem., *Homily* 12.8.2. For his father Faustinus, see Ps.-Clem., *Homily* 14.10.2. See also Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 3.18.4.

16. Hippolytus, *Haer.* 9.12; see Flexsenhar 2019a: 66-75.

17. In his open letter to the African proconsul Scapula, Tertullian lists Christians whom Severus could have known. Most prominent is a certain Proculus Torpation, a gifted healer who first healed Euodia and was later brought to Caesar’s palace (in palatio suo habuit) (Scarp. 4.5). See Flexsenhar 2019a: 70-75. But although Proclus might have temporarily lived in Caesar’s palace, he is not formally part of it.

18. Paulus 1831: 358. For another early discussion, see also de Wette 1847: 230-31.

19. Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 3.18.4. For Flavius Clement, see Suetonius, *Dom.* 15.1; Cassius Dio 67.14.1.
most powerful courtiers’. By identifying the names from Rom. 16 with names known from first-century literature and inscriptions, Lightfoot also sought to prove that there had indeed been members of the Christian community from the imperial household (1896: 171-78). Even up to the present, many interpreters, especially in the English-speaking world, have followed Lightfoot’s arguments. For their part, German-speaking scholars have been influenced by Adolf Deissmann’s modification of Lightfoot’s thesis. According to Deissmann (1927: 159-60),

Paul had no connections with the court; the salutations he once sends from them ‘that are of Caesar’s household’ are not from princesses and ministers, but from simple Imperial slaves, petty clerks, employed perhaps at Ephesus in the departments of finances or of crown land.

As a consequence of this tradition, many interpreters today think of οἱ ἐκ τῆς Καίσαρος οἰκίας as a ‘network of imperial civil servants, mostly slaves and freedman, throughout the empire’ (Osiek 2000: 124). Some sharpen this hypothesis and identify those from the house of Caesar with letter carriers from the imperial postal service, soldiers who guard imperial prisons, or associations of imperial slaves.

Caesars servi and Augusti liberti

Despite their tremendous success, Lightfoot’s and Deissmann’s theses face a crucial problem. There is no evidence in antiquity that ἡ οἰκία Καίσαρος translates as a Latin equivalent of familia Caesaris. To the contrary, as P.R.C. Weaver acknowledged in his classic study entitled Familia Caesaris (1972: 299),

‘Familia Caesaris’, in the general collective sense in which it is used throughout this study, does not occur in the ancient sources. Where the phrase does occur without further determination in the inscriptions and literary texts, the reference is to a particular ‘familia’ or branch of the administration, and has a purely local significance.

20. O’Brien 1995: 554; Fee 1995: 459; Bockmuehl: 1998, 269-70; Hawthorne and Martin 2004: 281; Hansen 2009: 311; Elboj 2015: 194-203.
21. Deissmann 1923: 126-27; cf. Dibelius 1937: 74-75; Gnilka 1968: 182; Müller 2002: 212-13.
22. Bormann (1995: 191, 198-201, 213) identifies those from the house of Caesar with his clients and assumes some connections between them and the colonists in Philippi.
23. ‘Christian couriers in the imperial service to and from Rome’ (Hemer 1989: 273; see, however, also Llewelyn 1995: 337-56); soldiers and other military personal (Hartland 2010: 21-49); an association or house-church of Christians from the house of Caesar (Reumann 2008: 739).
24. After Lightfoot, the term was introduced also by Bang 1919: 174-86.
Currently, only five instances of the Latin expression *familia Caesaris* are known. All five refer to groups of workers in specific occupations. Frontinus, *De aquaeductu urbis Romae* 116-18 mentions 460 workers from the *Caesaris familia*, founded by Claudius, alongside 240 from the *familia publica*, slaves from the city, who maintain the water supply in Rome. Four inscriptions mention groups of gladiators, military guards and workers in the production of money. From the middle of the first century onward, most imperial slaves no longer refer to a specific Caesar but call themselves *servi/ae Caesaris*. Freedpersons speak of themselves as *Augusti liberti*. Few bilingual inscriptions render the Latin *Caes(aris) n(os)tern(a) vern(a) houseborn slave* as *Καίσ(αρος) δοῦλ(ος)*.

The *Augusti liberti* or *servi Caesaris*, who are best known by their inscriptions or by their mention in historical accounts, belong to the imperial elite. At Philippi, three *Augusti liberti* of Caligula, *C(aii) Iuli [Au]gusti liberti*, donate two statues for Tiberius and Drusus to the forum. The installation of statues for the Caesars on the forum proves that Cad[m]us, Atimetus and Martiais[lis] must have been rich, powerful and influential, at least in the *Colonia Augusta Iulia Philippensis*. Similarly, Artemidorus explains in his book on onomancy – prophecy through dream interpretation – that a slave dreaming to fly to the sky will be promoted to the imperial court (*εἰς βασιλέως αὐλήν*). Yet promotion means working at the emperor’s court, not simply being one of his slaves. Therefore, Aloys Winterling assumes that slaves and freedpersons (once) owned by the Caesars and *Augusti* did not form a homogenous social class by their respective status. Their influence depended on where – that is, how close to the respective emperor and his immediate family – they worked.

Moreover, Michael Flexsenhar (2019a: 11-20) has recently drawn attention to the fact that the experience of imperial slaves was, as all forms of ancient slavery,
diverse. Besides those who worked close to the emperor or who were honored for being responsible for delicate tasks elsewhere in the imperial administration, many worked as simpler couriers (tabellarii), bookkeepers (tabulariicom), recordkeepers (commentarii), tax collectors (exactores) and the like. Others worked even in the emperor’s mines and agricultural estates (latifundia). We do not know whether the latter group bore the honorary name servi or vernae Caesaris. As Flexsenhar puts it, ‘Not every imperial slave, much less a freed person, was part of a familia Caesaris’ (2019a: 22).

Yet, in reading Phil. 4.22, Flexsenhar still counts among imperial slaves or freedpersons those ‘saints from the house of Caesar’ who send their greetings (2019a: 27-44). Likely examples of individuals from this group are, in his view, Tertius, Erastus and Quartus, mentioned in Rom. 16.22-23. Flexsenhar identifies the scribe Tertius, the oikonomos Erastus, the brother Quartus as dispensator and his helpers working in the financial administration in Corinth’s bureaucracy (2019a: 26-38). For Flexsenhar, the saints from the house of Caesar comprise a group or familia of slaves that worked in semiskilled positions in the financial administration at several places throughout the Roman Empire – at least in Ephesus, the likely place of Paul’s imprisonment, and in Philippi:

The ‘saints’ were particular individuals who were also devoted in some way to the Judean god. Paul passed on their greetings not because he had converted them but because they already knew the Philippians. The two groups were connected over the northern Aegean region by common family and labor networks (Flexsenhar 2019a: 123).

As Flexsenhar also observes, however, later Christians used Phil. 4.22 to locate their own past in the heart of imperial power (2019a: 45-88, 121-33). As we have seen, already at the end of the second century, the Martyrdom of Paul identifies those of the house of Caesar with Nero’s cupbearer and other most influential people (Acts Paul 11.1). That is, while familia and οἰκία have several technical meanings and can designate slaves or freedpersons, and the genitive Caesaris or Καῖσαρος can refer to one’s owner, ancient readers identified the saints from the house of Caesar not as a group of slaves working in the imperial administration in several cities, but rather as members of the emperor’s palace or family. In short, familia Caesaris is no generic term for imperial slaves or freedpersons. And οἱ ἐκ τῆς Καίσαρος οἰκίας remains an enigmatic, unique expression without ancient parallels.

‘Saints from the House of Caesar’ as a Code

Since there is no technical term familia Caesaris, whom could Paul have meant by οἱ ἐκ τῆς Καῖσαρος οἰκίας? I want to suggest that ‘saints from the house of
Caesar’ functions as a code for a group of co-prisoners and associates of Paul during his imprisonment who would have been endangered if their names had become public. While writing to his beloved brothers and sisters in Philippi, Paul sits in chains in a prison, presumably in Ephesus. As Flexsenhar (2021) and Omerzu (2021) argue in more detail in their contributions to this issue, the praetorium is a place where the Roman governor or his deputies would, among other things, sit in judgment in a provincial capital or a city with a place of provincial jurisdiction. Paul had already had a chance to make an apology in his case, but he failed, at least in terms of being released (Phil. 1.7, 13-14). His imprisonment has endangered those around him and caused conflicts among the believers (1.15-18, 28-30; 2.26-30). Paul is not very optimistic about his trial (1.21-24; 2.17-18). But even more, he is thankful for the solidarity of his friends in Philippi, who supported him by their loyalty and prayers and by sending money and their apostle Epaphroditus for further support (1.7, 19; 2.25-30; 4.10-20). Perhaps they even sent some financial overseers and emissaries to look after him and his fate. Not only to comfort the community at Philippi but also to give account of the money they invested in him, Paul tries to convince his friends that the small hope of his being released and returning to Philippi and of having some courageous sisters and brothers in Ephesus is in itself a sign that the gospel is still progressing (1.12-26).

The imprisoned apostle – calling himself a slave – writes as one of many prisoners in antiquity. His lines, read for themselves, give a small glimpse into ancient prison conditions. However, to read the letter of an ancient prisoner, one has to set aside the image Acts draws of the ostensibly detained Paul. Acts exposes its Paul to only half a night under the conditions of severe flogging,

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34. A majority argues, rightly in my view, that Paul wrote Philippians during an imprisonment in Ephesus, which is reflected also in 2 Cor. 1.8-10 and likely presupposed in Rom. 16.3-4, 7. A praetorium could include also a prison, as the praetorium did at some time in its history. See Cotton and Eck 2002: 230-32 no. 4. On the question of provenance, see the articles by Flexsenhar (2021), Omerzu (2021) and Campbell (2021) in this issue, and also, most recently, Flexsenhar 2019b: 17-45; Schellenberg 2018.

35. There is not a place called praetorium in Rome in the first century, and the expression ἐν ὅλῳ τῷ πραιτωρίῳ cannot refer to a group of people, i.e. the praetorian guard. Of the 209 references to the prepositional expression ἐν ὅλῳ listed in the TLG and the Packard Searchable Greek Inscriptions database up to the second century ce, none links it to a group of people. Instead, the entries combine ὅλος with corpora – for example, the body, a house, writings, life, and other temporal expressions. When a whole body of people is referred to, the expression is ἐν παντὶ τῷ λαῷ. The interpretation of ἐν ὅλῳ τῷ πραιτωρίῳ as referring to members of the praetorian guard seems to extrapolate from the image of Paul’s imprisonment described in Acts (see Flexsenhar 2019a: 24-25; Omerzu 2021: tbc). However, this part of the narrative of Acts is especially implausible. See below.

36. This is the original meaning and function of ἐπίσκοποι and διάκονοι, the ‘bishops and deacons’ Paul addresses among the saints in Philippi (Phil. 1.1).
torture, chains, and the darkness of an ancient prison (Acts 16.22-26). In contrast to the typical treatment of prisoners, all of Paul’s guards and hosts pay him deep respect – including the prison keeper in Philippi, the centurion in Jerusalem, Julius, the friendly centurion of the cohors Augusta, Publius and the leading citizen of Malta.\(^\text{37}\) For the Paul of Acts, detention turns into an opportunity to speak to the people of Jerusalem and Judea’s governors alike, and defense speeches give an opportunity for missionary success. Even the Jewish client king Agrippa must admit: ‘you’ll soon make a Christian of me’.\(^\text{38}\) Yet, what this Paul experiences in imprisonment cannot correspond to reality. The detained Paul of Acts faces better conditions than the Jewish prince and later client king Agrippa I, who is a member of the diplomatic elite in Rome raised with a later Caesar, according to the historical account of Josephus.\(^\text{39}\)

By referring to his fetters (δεσμοί) in Phil. 1.7, 13-14, 17, the real Paul reveals himself to be much more down to earth, in the world of an ordinary prisoner.\(^\text{40}\) Binding and chains are frequent omens in Artemidorus’s handbook of dream interpretation: ‘To imagine binding stilts on one’s feet signifies bondage for villainous men’ (Oneir. 3.15). Likewise, dreaming of the number \(p\) (100) is a bad omen for evildoers, since ‘criminals are put in chains, and pedai (foot-fetters) makes 100’ (Oneir. 3.34). In Lucian’s friendship novella Toxaris, the prisoner Antiphilus is confined by day with ‘a collar together with manacles upon one hand; but for the night he had to be fully secured by his bonds’ (29). Prisons were dark, humid and hot, frequently overfilled and extremely filthy.\(^\text{41}\) Those in public prisons had to wait until the governor or his representative was in town and held court days. This might last a month or even years. Prisoners often suffered from hunger and thirst. Therefore, many bitterly complained about their situation, sometimes in letters. Thus, the flute player Petakos writes to Zenon: ‘Before you depart, please do not leave me behind in prison, for I lack the most essential things. I adjure you by the health of the father and siblings and the good of

\(^{37}\) Acts 16.30-39; 22.26-29; 27.1-3, 43; 28.16-31. The place of imprisonment in Jerusalem is not called a ‘prison’ (φυλακή, δεσμωτήριον, εἱρκτή, πρατόρειον) but παρεμβολή (barracks): Acts 21.34, 37; 22.24; 23.10, 16, 32. In Caesarea, Paul stays in the praetorium, that is, within the palace of the Roman governor (23.35), where his custody is lightened immediately (ἀνέσις, Acts 24.23). On Malta Paul stays on the estate of the leading citizen Publius (Acts 28.7). At Rome he rents an apartment (Acts 28.16, 30).

\(^{38}\) Acts 26.28. See also Acts 16.30-33; 28.30-31, as well as Paul’s major speeches to the crowd in the temple (22.1-21) and his similar defense before Festus, Agrippa and their wives in Acts 26.1-32.

\(^{39}\) Josephus, Ant. 18.192-235. Agrippa enjoys only on the very last days of his imprisonment the libera custodia (Josephus, Ant. 18.235). See Skinner 2003; Standhartinger 2015: 110-11.

\(^{40}\) For ancient prisons, see Wansink 1996: 27-95.

\(^{41}\) For the bad conditions in prison, cf. Lucian, Tox. 28-32; Seneca, Ep. 77.1; Martyrdom of Perpetua 3.6; Martyrdom of Montanus 4.
Apollonius. Farewell’. For food and help, they depended on friends from outside who were able to bribe the prison guards. Not a few prisoners died in prison. Some New Testament writers urge believers to care about prisoners, and Christians became famous for this service. Torture was a regular part of court proceedings. Other sources of information were spies, intelligence agents and other informants who sounded out the prisoners. As an ancient saying went, ‘the emperor has many eyes and ears’.

As letters on papyrus demonstrate, Paul was not the only writer in prison. Writing in prison, however, lacks privacy. Letter writers who were in danger used techniques of concealment, like pseudonyms, riddling speech, shared metaphors, foreign or secret languages, or just opaque content. With such tactics, writers tried to hide their real message from unbidden readers and censors. In antiquity, Cicero’s letters became famous as sources for reflecting on

42. PSI 4.416 (3rd c. BCE). Similar letters, e.g.: P. Petr 3.36 verso (218 BCE): ‘To the Epimelētēs Nicanor. I have often written to you, for I am utterly overcome in prison, I am dying of hunger … Therefore I pray you, let me not perish of hunger in prison, but write to the jailer about it or send me to him … that I may find rescue’. Cf. P. Petr. 3.36 recto (3rd c. BCE); P. Yale 42 (229 BCE = White 1986: 54-55 (no. 28); P. Oxy. LVI 3870 (6th/7th c. CE); P. Cair. Masp. I 67020 (6th c. CE) or the ostracon O. Mon. Epiph. 117 (6th c. CE): ‘we were at pains and wrote to you and you have forgotten us in the captivity where we are, while they hung us up backward and took our breath out (of our bodies), and you did not visit us. For we gave our life for you; look you have forgotten us. Don’t trust the men, lest they kill us. For as the Lord lives, if you don’t reach us today with the money, there will be no life left in us. Send the rations for us to the jailer and give loaves and … Give it to Pesenthios and Panoute, from … her and Thekla. Pay the wage of … who shall bring this potsherd to you’ (trans. Bagnall and Cribiore 2006: 246).

43. See, e.g., P.Oxy. 3104 (228 CE).

44. Mt. 25.36, 39, 41; Heb. 10.34; 13.3; Lucian, Peregr: 12-13.

45. Krause 1996: 291-95; Wansink 1996: 50-55. Even in Acts a beating follows Paul’s arrests (16.23; 22.25). His claim of citizenship serves to rescue him from torture in Acts 22.25.

46. Cf. Martyrdom of Perpetua 3.5 (above); Philostratus, Apoll. 4.42; 7.27.36; Achilles Tatus, Leuc. Clit. 7.3; John Chrysostom, Iuv. 2–3. See Fuhrmann 2012: 151-57, 221; Sheldon 2005.

47. Xenophon, Cyr. 8.2.11-12; Lucian, Indoctus 23; Merc. Cond. 29; Aristides, Or. 27.29: ὃτα καὶ ἀφθαλοί πολλοὶ βασιλέως.

48. Some martyrdom accounts are prison letters as well: see Martyrdom of Perpetua 3–13; Martyrdom of Montanus 1–12; Martyrdom of Pionius; Eusebius, Hist. Eccl. 5.1.2-6.

49. The father of Philolas, the conspirator against Alexander, is said to have written in a letter to his son, ‘First, look out for yourselves, then for yours; for thus we shall accomplish what we have planned’ (Q. Curius Rufus, History of Alexander 6.9.14; trans. Rolf, LCL). Nevertheless, Alexander discovered the hidden message.

50. Disguise was even an esoteric technique in the Platonic school. In (Pseudo)-Plato’s Second Epistle 312d, he writes: ‘Now I must expound it [the doctrine concerning the nature of “the First”] in a riddling way [δῆ αἴνιγμα] in order that, should the tablet come to any harm “in fold of ocean or of earth”, he that readeth may not understand’ (trans. Bury, LCL); cf. Plutarch, Dion 21.1.4.
concealment techniques. Some Christian martyrs and their correspondents used codes that sound similar to Phil. 4.22. Tertullian warns those who are to become martyrs: ‘The prison, indeed, is the devil’s house as well, wherein he keeps his family’. Irony and mock-speech were also possible. Perpetua argues with a prison guard in order to be relocated to a better place in the prison: ‘For we are the most distinguished of the condemned prisoners, seeing that we belong to the emperor; we are to fight on his very birthday’. Indeed, those who would normally fight in the arena, gladiators, often belonged to the Caesars’ slaves or familia.

The greetings Paul conveys from ‘the saints, especially those from the house of Caesar’ contain, in my view, coded language intended to conceal the concrete identities of those who belong to the group. To uncover their real identities, two options are generally possible. First, the group from the house of Caesar could refer either to prison guards who had become saints or else to Jewish believers. There is some evidence that public prisons were secured by public slaves or soldiers. With the figures of the jailor in Philippi and the friendly Julius in charge of Paul’s transport to Rome, Acts shows one jailor who was converted and another who seems to have almost been converted. Still, quite apart from the question of sources for these narrative figures and the historical plausibility of Acts’ account, these two custodians remain singular figures and do not form a group. And it is uncertain how such persons could have even known the Christ-followers in Philippi.

Therefore, the most likely identification of the saints of the house of Caesar are, in my view, a group of believing co-prisoners at Ephesus. By referring to those in prison as the devil’s ‘family’ and as those who ‘belong to the emperor’, Tertullian and Perpetua come close to Paul’s coded language or creative metaphor. Therefore, the friends at Philippi could have identified the group as those who share their love and solidarity with the imprisoned Paul. Perhaps
one could detect here Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, Epaphras/Epaphroditus and Onesimus, who are named openly in Phlm. 23-24 and are identified as Paul’s co-prisoners by Col. 4.7-14. Yet this also leads to a further question: Why would the imprisoned Paul name the greeters in Philemon openly, even though he explicitly counts Epaphras and Onesimus among his co-prisoners, and yet conceal their names in Philippians? Perhaps it is because Paul and his co-prisoners face a much more dangerous situation while writing to the community at Philippi than earlier or later when Paul wrote to the congregation in the house of Philemon and Apphia. On the one hand, the insinuation in 2 Cor. 1.8-10 of severe afflictions that the missionary group experienced in the province of Asia (which led to the sentence of death) and, on the other, the fact that Paul openly expresses fear in Phil. 1.21-23 and 2.17-18 at least hint in this direction.

Conclusion

I hope to have shown that traditional identifications of those from the house of Caesar who greet the Philippians, according to Phil. 4.22, face major problems. Early modern interpretation doubts, for good reasons, that the historical Paul converted members of Claudius’s or Nero’s palace or was admitted to the palace himself, as ancient popular narratives and late antique and medieval interpreters suggest. Yet it is also not convincing to identify them as more or less highly placed imperial slaves and freedpersons, as Lightfoot and Deissmann argued to counter Baur’s critical denial of Paul’s authorship of Philippians. The quasi-technical term familia Caesaris was coined only in modern times. The Greek expression οἱ ἐκ τῆς Καίσαρος οἰκίας is not attested in antiquity beyond Philippians. In any event, it is no translation of the Latin expressions Caesaris servi or Augusti liberti, the emperor’s slaves or freedpersons who – as we know from material evidence – made up the elite in the imperial administration. Therefore, I have argued that Καίσαρος οἰκία is a code or creative metaphor for a group affiliated with the prison in which Paul was detained while writing to the Philippians. Without a definitive interpretive key, which the Philippians might have shared with Paul, the code or metaphor remains disguised. However, from what we know about ancient imprisonment and from what some figurative expressions in Christian martyrdom accounts suggest, I propose that Paul has his believing co-prisoners in mind. In contrast to the greetings in the letter to Philemon and Apphia, he conceals their names behind the creative metaphor ‘saints from the house of Caesar’ in order to protect them in a highly dangerous moment of life. Paul’s code worked so well that every attempt at decryption must remain a sustained hypothesis.
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