

# **Polemicizing with Preputial Precision: What We Can Learn about Paul’s Opponents in Galatians and Philippians by Understanding the Differences between Two Types of Physical Circumcision\***

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## **Abstract**

Asha Moorthy has observed, “there has...been little if any real attention in New Testament studies to the question of how circumcision was physically carried out in Paul’s time.” This is unfortunate because almost no other NT scholars seem even to be aware that there are different types of circumcision and that there are significant differences between them. Being aware of these types of circumcision and their relative popularity or rarity has the potential to cast much-needed light on Paul’s polemics in Galatians and Philippians. I argue that Paul is accustomed to a type of circumcision that only removes a small ring of skin (the *akroposthion*) and that this is by far the most prevalent circumcision practice among Jews of his time (following Nissan Rubin). Also, there is evidence that Philo advocated for a more severe form of circumcision, which removes the entire cylindrical prepuce, and that he advocated for this more severe circumcision due to his unique theology of circumcision. Philo is the only witness in Early Judaism of the view that the physical act of circumcision actually has a moral-ethical effect on the person. I show that Paul encounters opponents in Galatians and Philippians who share Philo’s ideas and practices of circumcision. I argue that Paul’s polemics in Galatians in Philippians are not aimed at Jews or circumcision *per se*, but rather at a more contingent and occasional problem, namely, specific opponents who practice a novel and more

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severe circumcision than what was the norm to surgically guarantee control of the passions. Paul thinks this ostensible “moral surgery” is dubious and a direct affront to the work of Christ in the believer.

## Keywords

Circumcision, Philo, Paul, Paul within Judaism, Galatians, Philippians

## 1. Introduction

As Asha Moorthy observes, “there has, historically, been little if any real attention in New Testament studies to the question of how circumcision was physically carried out in Paul’s time.”<sup>1</sup> This is unfortunate because almost no NT scholars seem even to be aware that there are different types of circumcision and that there are significant differences between them.<sup>2</sup> Being aware of these types of circumcision and their relative popularity or rarity has the potential to cast much-needed light on Paul’s polemics in Galatians and Philippians. Although there are a few different styles of circumcision that will be discussed here, the main ones this essay will be concerned with I will name *milah* and *periah*.<sup>3</sup> First, I will set forth the differences between these two circumcisions and show why *milah* is the customary practice among Jews of Paul’s time. I will also argue that Philo likely endorses a type of circumcision that is very similar to *periah* and that this is probably due to his unique belief that circumcision is morally operative—it surgically engineers morality. Then, I will argue that Paul encounters opponents in Galatians and Philippians who share these notions and that knowing the Philonic background, as well as the differences between *milah* and *periah*, can illuminate Paul’s polemics. That is, his polemics in Galatians in Philippians are not aimed at Jews or circumcision *per se*, but rather at proselytes

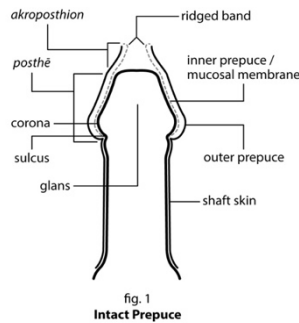
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<sup>1</sup> Asha Moorthy, “A Seal of Faith: Rereading Paul on Circumcision, Torah, and the Gentiles” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2013), 52, <https://academiccommons.columbia.edu/catalog/ac:166824>.

<sup>2</sup> Besides Moorthy, Matthew Thiessen is the only NT scholar I have come across who seems aware of *milah* and *periah* circumcisions, but he does not entertain the possibility that this has something to do with Paul’s polemics in Galatians and Philippians (Thiessen, *Contesting Conversion: Genealogy, Circumcision, and Identity in Ancient Judaism and Christianity* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011], 54–55).

<sup>3</sup> While *milah* derives from the Hebrew verb מל (“to circumcise,” cf. Gen 17:10–14), *periah* is a rabbinic term meaning “open/expose” (indicating the full uncovering of the glans down past the corona) and is thus technically anachronistic when talking about the time of Paul and before. It is used here heuristically to refer to the same type of circumcision that became the rabbinic standard that was also practiced limitedly before the Tannaitic period.

who practice *periah*, a novel and more “severe [circumcision] regimen” than *milah*.<sup>4</sup>



## 2. Penile Anatomy, *Lipodermos*, and Foreskin Regeneration

To determine what kind of circumcision is envisioned by an ancient text and thus to grasp the physical differences between *milah* and *periah*, it is necessary to get an elementary handle on some penile anatomy and vocabulary (see Fig. 1).<sup>5</sup> The penis consists of a shaft and the glans penis or simply glans (i.e., the head). The rim around the glans that meets the shaft is called the corona or coronal ridge. The point at which the shaft meets the corona is the sulcus. The preputial skin is a complex structure consisting of (a) outer skin coterminous with the shaft skin and it lays atop the glans, (b) the inner skin or mucosal membrane that is the underside of the outer skin and thus is the skin touching the glans, (c) the junction or boundary between the outer skin and inner mucosal skin is called the ridged band and it is the opening or tip of the preputial skin that protrudes beyond the glans in infancy (and usually still for most intact adults) and, (d) the frenulum on the ventral (under) side pulls and keeps the entire foreskin-structure covering the glans when flaccid (it is a band between the meatus [urethral opening] and the ridged band). The frenulum and ridged band work together to keep the entire foreskin covering the glans while flaccid so that the preputial skin does not retract easily/automatically and thus expose the glans. I will use “entire foreskin” or “foreskin-structure” to refer to all the

<sup>4</sup> Shaye J. D. Cohen, *Why Aren't Jewish Women Circumcised? Gender and Covenant in Judaism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 25.

<sup>5</sup> Sorrells Morris L. et al., “Fine-Touch Pressure Thresholds in the Adult Penis,” *BJU International* 99.4 (2007): 864–869; R. K. Winkelmann, “The Cutaneous Innervation of Human Newborn Prepuce,” *Journal of Investigative Dermatology* 26.1 (1956): 53–67; R. K. Winkelmann, “The Erogenous Zones: Their Nerve Supply and Its Significance,” *Proceedings of the Staff Meetings. Mayo Clinic* 34.3 (1959): 39–47; Nissan Rubin, “Brit Milah: A Study of Change in Custom,” in *The Covenant of Circumcision: New Perspectives on an Ancient Jewish Rite*, ed. Elizabeth Wyner Mark (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2003), 87–97, 223–228.

components of the preputial skin just listed, but these parts will be important for what follows.

For our purposes, it is also necessary to see how the Greeks used their terminology. Frederick M. Hodges observes:

The Greeks understood the prepuce to be composed of two distinct structures: the *posthē* (πόσθη<sup>6</sup>) and the *akroposthion* (ακροπόσθιον<sup>7</sup>).... Rufus of Ephesus, a physician under Trajan (98–117 C.E.), describes the penis accordingly:

The tip of the shaft is called the glans [*balanos*], and the skin around the glans [is called the] prepuce [*posthē*], and the extremity of the prepuce is called the *akroposthion*.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, I will use *posthē* to refer to what the Greeks called the πόσθη (sometimes ποσθία or πόσθιον) and *akroposthion* to refer only to the skin that hangs over *beyond* the glans (hence the ἄκρος-prefix: ἀκροπόσθιον—term favored by the Greeks—ἀκροβυστία—term favored by the LXX/NT).<sup>9</sup>

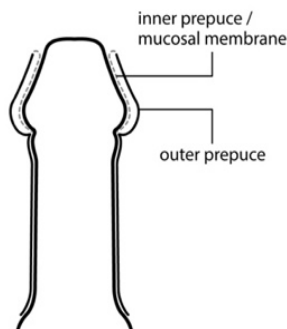


fig. 2  
*Lipodermos*  
and *Milah*

<sup>6</sup> Along with its variations, such as πόσθιον or ποσθία.

<sup>7</sup> Along with its variations, such as ἀκροποσθία and ἀκροποσθή.

<sup>8</sup> Frederick M. Hodges, “The Ideal Prepuce in Ancient Greece and Rome: Male Genital Aesthetics and Their Relation to *Lipodermos*, Circumcision, Foreskin Restoration, and the *Kynodesmē*,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 75.3 (2001): 377–378; brackets original; cf. 395.

<sup>9</sup> According to LSJ, -βυστία might have derived from the Babylonian root “*buštu* ‘pudenda’” and the Hebrew “*bōsheth* ‘shame’” (s.v. “ἀκροβυστία” II, 2). As Moorthy keenly observes, “If ἄκρος is taken to mean ‘highest’ or ‘farthest point’ then ἀκροβυστία might signify...the ‘height (in metaphorical sense) of shame’” represented in the physical ἀκροπόσθιον (“Seal,” 56, n.40).

Due to variations in human biology, some males have a short foreskin structure so that the ridged band does not hang over the glans but rather rests somewhere along the glans itself, leaving part of the glans exposed (see Fig. 2). The Greeks called this *lipodermos*, “lacking skin,” because even though there was an intact prepuce, there was no *akroposthion*, only a *posthē*.<sup>10</sup> Although Greeks and Romans exercised nude, exposing the glans in any fashion in public was shameful.<sup>11</sup> Thus, there were various “treatments designed to lengthen defectively short foreskins” (see Fig. 3).<sup>12</sup>

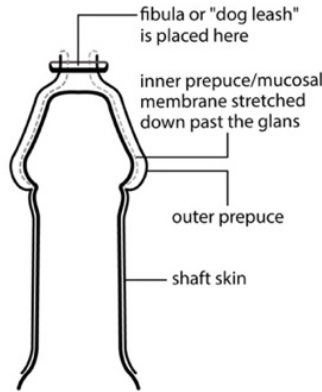


fig. 3  
**Episperm  
Techniques**

For example, Soranus<sup>13</sup> advises:

If the infant is male and it looks as though it has [*lipodermos* {λειπόδερμον}] gently draw [ἐπισπάσθω] the tip of the foreskin forward or even hold it together with a stand of wool to fasten it. For if gradually stretched and continuously drawn forward [ἐπισπωμένη], it easily stretches and assumes its normal length and covers the glans [βάλανον] and becomes accustomed to keep the natural good shape. (*Gynecology* 2.34)<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Hodges, “Ideal Prepuce,” 394–395.

<sup>11</sup> Hodges, “Ideal Prepuce,” 392–393, 405.

<sup>12</sup> Robert G. Hall, “Epispasm and the Dating of Ancient Jewish Writings,” *JSP* 2 (1988): 71.

<sup>13</sup> Soranus “practiced during the reigns of Trajan and Hadrian” (Hall, “Epispasm,” 71).

<sup>14</sup> Soranus, *Soranus’ Gynecology*, trans. Owsei Temkin (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991); Greek from Soranus, *Sorani Gynaeciorum Libri IV: De Signis Fracturarum, De Fasciis, Vita Hippocratis Secundum Soranum*, ed. Ioannes Ilberg, *Corpus Medicorum Graecorum* 4 (Leipzig: Teubner, 1927).

Galen (ca. 129–210 CE) similarly recommends tensioning the skin of the *posthē* to create an *akroposthion*, but he outlines directions for fashioning a device rather than manually tensioning the *posthē* (*De methodo medendi* 14.16). These versions of *akroposthion* restoration work because constant tensioning of the skin induces mitosis, and new skin cells grow, thus expanding the surface area of the skin.<sup>15</sup>

Another solution was a κυνοδέσμη (“dog leash”). The κυνοδέσμη was “a thin leather thong wound around the *akroposthion* that pulled the penis upward and was tied in a bow, tied around the waist, or secured by some other means.”<sup>16</sup> It served to ensure that the glans did not get exposed during athletic performance (i.e., it was worn for modesty insurance). It was also used to lengthen the prepuce of those with *lipodermos* by drawing the *posthē* beyond the glans and thus providing sufficient tension to induce mitosis and grow an *akroposthion*.

Still, another remedy is infibulation (Celsus, *On Medicine* 7.25.2; Martial, *Epigr.* 7.82).<sup>17</sup> This is where the short prepuce would be stretched past the glans and then secured with “a pin called a fibula” that is pierced through the left and right sides of the *posthē*. The fibula prevents the *posthē* from retracting and exposing part or all of the glans (i.e., the glans is stopped from protruding past the fibula).

Finally, Celsus (before 90 CE)<sup>18</sup> gives directions for how to surgically restore an *akroposthion* for both those who were born with *lipodermos* or who have been circumcised (*Med.* 7.25.1).

### 3. *Milah* and *Periah*

Whereas *milah* circumcision only excises the *akroposthion*, *periah* excises the *akroposthion* and the *posthē* “peeling back...the mucosal membrane lining the [inner]foreskin, thus fully uncovering the glans” (cf. m. Šabb. 19:2, 6) (cf. figs. 1, 2, and 4).<sup>19</sup> The Mishnah says that after the *milah* (מילה) cut, the “circumcision,” what follows is *periah* (פריה), the “exposing,” to fully uncover the “corona” (m. Šabb. 19:2; cf. 19:6).<sup>20</sup> *Milah* names the first cut and *periah*

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Dioscorides Pedanius who suggests an herbal treatment of Thapsia for *lipodermos* to cause swelling in the prepuce (*Mat. med.* 4.153.4). There is a plethora of research in medical journals under “tissue expansion.” For more, see Hodges, “Ideal Prepuce,” 397.

<sup>16</sup> Hodges, “Ideal Prepuce,” 381–384, esp. 381. For more details on *epispasm*, infibulation, and the κυνοδέσμη, see Andreas Blaschke, *Beschneidung: Zeugnisse Der Bibel Und Verwandter Texte*, TANZ 28 (Tübingen: Francke, 1998), 139–144.

<sup>17</sup> Hall, “Epispasm,” 72; cf. Hodges, “Ideal Prepuce,” 381.

<sup>18</sup> E. Mary Smallwood, *The Jews under Roman Rule: From Pompey to Diocletian*, SJLA 20 (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 376.

<sup>19</sup> Rubin, “Brit Milah,” 88.

<sup>20</sup> Hebrew from Ms. Kaufmann. Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest, Ms. A 50. Accessed through OakTree Software, Inc. (2009).

names a second cut whereby the corona is “uncover[ed]...by cutting off the membrane [i.e., the *posthē*] that adheres to it [the glans].”<sup>21</sup> The *posthē* is fused to the glans at birth usually up to puberty (and sometimes beyond),<sup>22</sup> which is why *milah* leaves it adhering to the glans. There are thus two cuts in a *periah* circumcision: (1) the excision of the *akroposthion* (*milah*) and (2) the tearing of the *posthē* down past the corona and excising all remaining “shreds” of preputial skin (*periah*). According to the Mishnah, “the inner lining” of the prepuce needs to be “torn” because if “flesh ... covers the greater part of the corona” (i.e., if there is even enough prepuce skin remaining to crest the corona), then “these shreds” would “render the circumcision invalid” (m. Šabb. 19:6).<sup>23</sup> This means *milah* leaves behind what *periah* excises according to the Mishnah’s procedural definitions. That is, *milah* leaves the *posthē* fused to the glans.<sup>24</sup> This is enough preputial skin to extend beyond the glans if stretched, but without a ridged band and a severed frenulum it would not stay in place on its own and would inevitably retract off the glans somewhat (hence the need for a fibula or a *κυνοδέσμη*, “dog leash,” if the person wanted to “cover up” their circumcision [see Fig. 3]). *Milah* is therefore *medically equivalent* to *lipodermos* from the Greco-Roman perspective (Fig. 2).

This is evident not only from the definitions of *milah* and *periah* in the Mishnah but also because Jewish males regularly partook in the above remedies for *lipodermos*. If a Jewish male wanted to participate in the gymnasium (e.g., 2 Macc 4:12–13), they could either use one of the many *epispasm* methods, e.g., a fibula or a *κυνοδέσμη*, to ensure that their glans would not be exposed (Fig. 3). By using these techniques, they continually stretch their *posthē* down past the glans. This tension induces tissue expansion of the preputial skin. Before long, they would re-grow sufficient *posthē* that hangs *beyond* the glans again, thereby regenerating an *akroposthion*. Or they might opt to undergo a surgery like the one described by Celsus. But it is important to realize that Celsus assumes the presence of sufficient remaining *posthē* even in one who has been circumcised (i.e., he cannot be talking about *periah*). He says that the surgery requires “the

<sup>21</sup> Shaye J. D. Cohen, “Tractate Shabbat,” in *The Oxford Annotated Mishnah: A New Translation of the Mishnah with Introductions and Notes*, ed. Shaye J. D. Cohen, Robert Goldenberg, and Hayim Lapin, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 423, cf. 425.

<sup>22</sup> This is why “skin bridges” can form after some circumcisions: Lee E. Ponsky et al., “Penile Adhesions after Neonatal Circumcision,” *The Journal of Urology* 164.2 (2000): 495–496.

<sup>23</sup> Translation from Cohen, “Tractate Shabbat,” 425.

<sup>24</sup> While we cannot know exactly how much of the *akroposthion* is removed with *milah*, we know it does not cut the *posthē* because (a) it is fused to the glans until puberty, (b) the *posthē*—the preputial skin covering the glans from the corona to the urethra (Fig. 1)—is specifically what *periah* tears away and removes (“the shreds [of the foreskin]...that covers the greater part of the corona,” m. Šabb. 19:6), and (c), as discussed just below, without a *posthē* future foreskin regeneration would be impossible.

adjacent skin [to the glans—i.e., the *posthē*—to be] rather ample” (*Med.* 7.25.1 [LCL]), which rules out *periah* because the whole point of *periah* is removing all the *posthē* so that the entire corona is fully exposed (*m. Šabb.* 19:2, 6).<sup>25</sup>

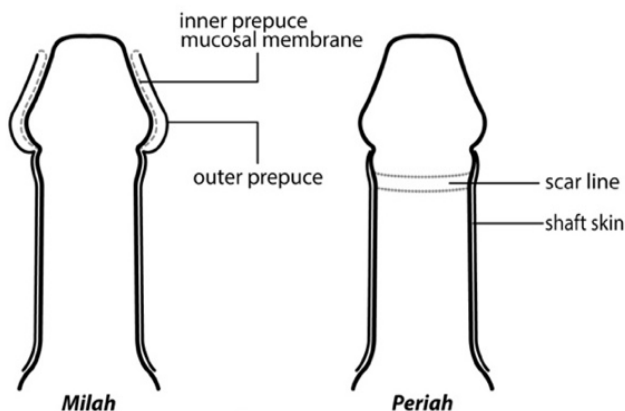


fig. 4  
Two Types of Circumcision

If the entire *posthē* is removed, as it is with *periah*, then there is physically no preputial skin to draw down to cover the glans and secure with a fibula or a *κυνοδέσμη* or to surgically repair (Fig. 4).<sup>26</sup> This indicates that Celsus and the other medical advocates for *akroposthion* restoration techniques were not aware of anything like *periah*, but only of something like *milah*. In fact, Nissan Rubin argues that “the requirement of *periah* ... was instituted by the Rabbis following the Bar Kokhba Revolt for the purpose of.... mak[ing] decircumcision no longer a feasible undertaking for Hellenizing Jews.”<sup>27</sup> With *periah*, not only is the glans fully exposed, but any remaining preputial skin is cut off as well since the entirety of the prepuce is drawn down toward the base of the penile shaft past the corona and sulcus (*m. Šabb.* 19:2, 6). As Rubin makes clear, after this process of “a radical circumcision that removes the maximum outer skin and rolls back completely the inner membrane, the stretching of a sufficient amount of skin from the shaft of the penis to create a pseudo-foreskin would take years, according to reports from [modern] foreskin restoration

<sup>25</sup> Cohen, “Tractate Shabbat,” 423, 425.

<sup>26</sup> See Blaschke, “Die *פריעה* machte das Anlegen einer *κυνοδέσμη* unmöglich und erschwerte den Epispasmos” (*Beschneidung*, 144; cf. 143).

<sup>27</sup> Rubin, “*Brit Milah*,” 88; cf. Cohen, “Jewish Women,” 25–26, 232, n. 69. Thus, Blaschke is mistaken when he thinks *periah* was instituted after the Maccabean rebellion (*Beschneidung*, 141, 144). The evidence points to the supposition that *periah* was instituted after Hadrian since *epispasm* was popularized again during Hadrian’s reign (*Gen. Rab.* 46.13), which would not have been possible if these men underwent *periah*.



groups” and this renders “the drawing down of the foreskin...no longer feasible” for the ancient Jew.<sup>28</sup>

Without a *posthē*, all the medical remedies for *lipodermos* could not physically work. These types of *akroposthion* restoration are only possible for an ancient Jewish male if they have a *posthē* left to stretch. Although Andreas Blaschke knows that *periah* renders non-surgical *epispasm* “considerably difficult” (“da die פריעה den Vollzug eines nichtchirurgischen Epispasmos zumindest erheblich erschwert”),<sup>29</sup> he assumes that epispasm after the Maccabean period refers to surgical (“chirurgische”) foreskin re-creation as prescribed by Celsus above.<sup>30</sup> But this assumption profoundly misunderstands how much preputial skin is removed with *periah*. There is simply not enough skin to do what Celsus prescribes since he requires having “rather ample” preputial skin for the operation (*Med.* 7.25.1). So much skin is removed with *periah* that such a large portion of the remaining skin on the penile shaft would have to be cut from the pubic base and pulled over the glans, leaving an equivalent portion of the penile shaft as an entirely open wound.<sup>31</sup> Celsus, however, imagines that the patient only needs a “small ring” of additional skin to grow (7.25.1 [LCL]), which is exactly what one would expect for a patient that has a *posthē*, but is just missing the *akroposthion*, consisting of the “small ring,” which is the ridged band plus however much preputial skins hangs over the glans (Fig. 1). This is why *periah* as a widespread practice had to come much later than Blaschke supposes.<sup>32</sup> As long as some form of *akroposthion* regeneration is considered viable, this means *milah* was the norm.<sup>33</sup>

Therefore, the vast amount of evidence there is for Jewish males undergoing various forms of foreskin restoration from the Maccabean era up to Hadrian from a wide range of sources means that the *milah* cut was standard

<sup>28</sup> Rubin, “*Brit Milah*,” 88, 92; also note that modern Western circumcision gives the same result as *periah* (Leonard B. Glick, *Marked in Your Flesh: Circumcision from Ancient Judea to Modern America* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005], 5–6).

<sup>29</sup> Blaschke, *Beschneidung*, 141.

<sup>30</sup> Blaschke, *Beschneidung*, 141; his emphasis.

<sup>31</sup> While *milah* only removed the overhanging skin, *periah* removed a lot of surface area. To calculate an estimate of the amount of skin removed, think of the lateral surface area of a cylinder (i.e., a cylinder without the top or bottom circles) as opposed to an o-ring of skin with *milah*, which is mainly just the circumference of the ridged band plus the amount of *akroposthion* overhanging the glans. With *periah*, however, the radius of the corona needs to be multiplied by  $2\pi$  and by at least the length of the glans (*posthē*) plus the amount of *akroposthion* overhanging the glans. This would only account for the surface area of the outer skin, however. Thus, the total needs to be multiplied by two to account for the prepuce’s outer layer of skin covering the length of the glans and an inner layer of mucosal skin covering the length of the glans.

<sup>32</sup> Rubin, “*Brit Milah*,” 95–96.

<sup>33</sup> Rubin, “*Brit Milah*,” 92.

in this period (1 Macc 1:11–15; 2 Macc 4:12<sup>34</sup>; Jub. 15:33–34; Josephus, *Ant.* 12.241; T. Mos. 8:3; 1 Cor 7:18; Gen. Rab. 46.13; Celsus, *Med.* 7.25; Martial, *Epigr.* 7.82). Also, Paul explicitly referring to *epispasm* in 1 Cor 7:18 (μὴ ἐπισπᾶσθω)—he and Soranus are the only ones to use this “technical term” for lengthening the *posthē*<sup>35</sup>—means that Paul understands circumcision for only consist of the singular *milah* cut.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, the Samaritans did not and do not practice *periah*, which then also attests that *milah* is the earliest type of Israelite circumcision.<sup>37</sup>

Therefore, as Rubin concludes, “*periah* was an innovation instituted over the course of time, most likely in response to the drawing down of the foreskin...practiced during the of the Hadrianic persecutions.”<sup>38</sup> This means that “until the middle of the second century CE the sanctioned method of circumcision [*milah*] allowed for the possibility of stretching and drawing down remaining foreskin tissue and thereby ‘crossing the border’ of Jewish society.”<sup>39</sup>

One of the reasons foreskin restoration may have gained popularity in the late first century could due to the *fiscus Judaicus* instituted by Vespasian.<sup>40</sup> In the context of discussing this tax under Domitian and how some Jews “concealed their origin and did not pay the tribute levied upon their people” Suetonius records, “I recall being present in my youth when the person of a man ninety years old was examined before the procurator and a very crowded court, to whether he was circumcised” (*Dom.* 12.2 [LCL]). Whether or not this public stripping was common, the fear of such a humiliating experience would be sufficient reason for Jewish males who wanted either to avoid the tax or abandon Torah-observance altogether to go through some form of foreskin regeneration. *Periah* becoming the norm was likely reactionary to the possibility of foreskin regeneration among concerned Jews not wanting their sons to be physically capable of foreskin regeneration later in life. We know that later many considered foreskin regeneration to be blatant apostasy (b. Sanh. 38b; y. Pe’ah 1:1, 54; y. Sanh. 10:1, 2; t. Hor. 1:5; cf. y. Yebam. 8:1, 11, 13; cf. 1 Macc 1:11–15; 2 Macc 4:12–17) so perhaps these parents and earlier rabbis were already trying to prevent the viability of re-growing an *akroposthion* on the supposed

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<sup>34</sup> Following Sara Parks, “thesis: the author uses humour elsewhere, the gymnasium is mentioned as a contentious topic, circumcisions were being reversed at this time, ergo I think “greek hat” is a joke for foreskin” (“When a Hat Isn’t a Hat: Continuing the Tradition of Hebrew Penis Euphemisms in a Hellenistic Anti-Hellenistic Text,” paper presented at the Sheffield Institute of Interdisciplinary Biblical Studies [SIIBS] Seminar Series, Feb 22, 2021). That is, “submitting under the Greek hat” (ὑποτάσσων ὑπὸ πέτασον) is likely a metaphor for re-growing an *akroposthion*, the Greek “hat” for the glans.

<sup>35</sup> Hall, “Epispasm,” 73.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Moorthy, “Seal,” 58.

<sup>37</sup> Rubin, “*Brit Milah*,” 94–95; Thiessen, *Contesting Conversion*, 55.

<sup>38</sup> Rubin, “*Brit Milah*,” 92–93.

<sup>39</sup> Rubin, “*Brit Milah*,” 88.

<sup>40</sup> Josephus, *J.W.* 7.218; cf. Smallwood, *Jews*, 376–377; Hall, “Epispasm,” 78.

theological grounds that it would constitute “a deliberate act of defection from the Jewish public, not justified by external duress.”<sup>41</sup> Rubin thus concludes that *periah* became a common practice to preemptively prevent foreskin regeneration “because the procedure renders epispasm extremely difficult.”<sup>42</sup> I would only add that knowing the anatomical realities means that *periah* renders foreskin regeneration not just “extremely difficult,” but essentially impossible for ancient Jews. Whatever the specific impetus, the motive to practice *periah* seems to be aimed specifically at preventing the possibility that an adult male would be able to restore their remaining *posthē* into an *akroposthion* through any of the above means of skin-tissue expansion.

#### 4. Philo and *Periah*

Even though the surgical procedures for *periah* are outlined in the Mishnah, the Rabbis likely did not invent this new type of circumcision. It seems that (proto-) *periah* might have been practiced by a minority of Jews earlier.<sup>43</sup> It may have been practiced by those who wrote/received Jubilees:<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Rubin, “*Brit Milah*,” 90–92, esp. 91.

<sup>42</sup> Shaye J. D. Cohen, “Judaism to the Mishnah: 135–220 C.E.,” in *Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism: A Parallel History of Their Origins and Early Development*, ed. Hershel Shanks (Washington, DC: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1992), 200.

<sup>43</sup> One example Moorthy points to needs to be dismissed immediately, however. Referring to the archeological work of Philip King who “points out that the Assyrian reliefs depicting naked and impaled Israelites at the battle of Lachish seem to present Figures with the “entire glans” exposed,” she concludes along with King that “since the Lachish reliefs were carved in the 8th century BCE, this would seem to suggest that *periah* was introduced at a much earlier date than posited by Rubin” (“Seal,” 54). But the mere fact of an exposed glans does not automatically mean that *periah* was practiced at the time. That is a fallacious assumption due to not understanding the foreskin anatomy and function of its parts. A *milah* circumcision would also expose the glans because the circumcision excised the ridged band and severed the frenulum. Without these two pulling and keeping the *posthē* over the glans, the *posthē* easily retracts back to the corona and stays that way unless held in place with some sort of device (like a fibula or κυνοδέσμη). Also, as will be highlighted below, the Egyptians practiced a type of circumcision that was very much like *milah*, and it also exposed the glans (see Guy Cox and Brian J. Morris, “Why Circumcision: From Prehistory to the Twenty-First Century,” in *Surgical Guide to Circumcision*, ed. David A. Bolnick, Martin Koyle, and Assaf Yosha [Dordrecht: Springer, 2012], 246, 251–252). Therefore, an exposed glans is hardly evidence for *periah* circumcision. (Moorthy is referring to Philip J. King, “Gezer and Circumcision,” in *Confronting the Past Archaeological and Historical Essays on Ancient Israel in Honor of William G. Dever*, ed. Seymour Gitin, J. Edward Wright, and J.P. Dessel [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006], 333–340.)

<sup>44</sup> Translations of Jubilees from James C. VanderKam, *Jubilees: A Commentary in Two Volumes*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2018), 1:507.

I am now telling you that the Israelites will prove false to this ordinance. They will not circumcise their sons in accord with this entire law because they will leave some of the flesh of their circumcision when they circumcise their sons. (Jub. 15:33)

Moorthy notes that “It may be suggested that ‘the flesh of their circumcision’ which ‘they will leave’ is equivalent to the ‘shreds of the foreskin’ which ‘remain’ referred to in Mishnah (m. Šabb. 19:6).”<sup>45</sup> But as Rubin brings out, “not all scholars agree about the translation of the Ethiopian text.... E.g., Charles translates: ‘... for in the flesh of their children they will omit this circumcision of their sons’.... Therefore it is not clear whether 15:33 talks about leaving flesh.”<sup>46</sup> Because of this difficulty, we ought not base anything substantial on this evidence even if it has to be noted for the sake of comprehensiveness. Nevertheless, if “for they have made themselves like the nations” (Jub. 15:34) refers to *akroposthion* restoration (even though it could mean simply that parents are not circumcising their sons per Charles), then this again would indicate that *milah* was the norm when Jubilees was written since *akroposthion* restoration is physically impossible after *periah*.

The best evidence that something like *periah* was practiced by some Jews while *milah* was the widespread norm comes from Philo (and then Paul’s polemics in Galatians and Philippians).<sup>47</sup> This comes out especially in *Spec.* 1.3–11 when he discusses the physical and moral benefits of circumcision and seems to be corroborated by what he says about a “two-fold circumcision” in *Somn.* 2:24–25. From Philo’s vocabulary, it is clear he thinks circumcision involves the removal of both the ἀκροποσθία as well as the ποσθία: he uses ἀκροποσθία only once in his writings in *Spec.* 1.4, but he uses a version of ποσθία three times: ποσθένης in *Spec.* 1.4, ποσθίας in *Spec.* 1.5 (the plural here likely indicates *posthē*-and-*akroposthion*), and ποσθίας in *Spec.* 1.7.

Just as significant, Philo talks about circumcision involving “severe pains” and describes it as mutilation: “so many myriads in each generation are mutilated [ἀποτέμνεσθαι], with miserable pains in maiming [ἀκρωτηριαζούσας] the bodies of themselves.... it seemed necessary to the legislators to maim [ἀκρωτηριάζειν] the organ serving such instances-of-sexual-intercourse” (*Spec.* 1.3, 9).<sup>48</sup> The removal of the entire foreskin-structure (*posthē*-and-*akroposthion*)

<sup>45</sup> Moorthy, “Seal,” 55; Thiessen likewise thinks Jubilees “advocates *periah*” (*Contesting Conversion*, 172, n. 52).

<sup>46</sup> Rubin, “*Brit Milah*,” 224, n. 18. VanderKam has a textual note for Jub. 15:33 that aligns with this. The translation might be: “they will leave the circumcision of their flesh” (*Jubilees*, 1:509); i.e., they simply will not circumcise.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Moorthy who also thinks Philo advocated for *periah* (“Seal,” 58–60), but here I give unique reasons as to why this is the case.

<sup>48</sup> Translations of Philo are mine unless otherwise noted. The Greek comes from the LCL volumes.

was a radically invasive procedure involving the removal of a significant amount of skin and Philo's use of "mutilate" and "maim" suggests that he is aware that his contemporaries would view what he is describing as a kind of genital mutilation.

Diodorus Siculus (ca. 90 BC–30 BCE) and Strabo (ca. 63 BC–23 CE) differentiate between "circumcision" and "mutilation," and Philo's vocabulary indicates that he is aware of this. Diodorus writes:

All the Troglodytes are circumcised [περιτέμνονται] like the Egyptians with the exception of those who, because of what they have experienced, are called "colobi" [κολοβῶν i.e., "mutilated ones"]; for these alone of all who live inside the Straits have in infancy all that part cut completely off with the razor which among other peoples merely suffers circumcision [ἐκ νηπίου ξυροῖς ἀποτέμνονται πᾶν τὸ τοῖς ἄλλοις μέρος περιτομῆς τυγχάνων]. (*Bib. hist.* 3.32.4 [LCL])

It is unlikely that "all that part" (πᾶν τὸ...μέρος) refers to "the penis" or "the glans" (βάλανος)—i.e., the κολοβοί did not amputate their penis or the glans. "All that part" more likely refers to the entire "foreskin-structure" (*posthē*-and-*akroposthion*) because it is referring to what in other peoples is "circumcised" and it is the *akroposthion* of the *preputial skin*, not the penis or the glans, that is cut in circumcision. Those who are "merely" circumcised cut the *akroposthion* and retain the *posthē*. Diodorus is thus saying the κολοβοί have their entire foreskin-structure ("all that part") removed, leaving them *without* a *posthē* and thus with a permanently exposed glans. Speaking about κολοβός more broadly, Pierre Cordier agrees that it does not have to do with amputating the glans but with excising the entire foreskin-structure.<sup>49</sup> This is why knowing penile anatomy is important. If Diodorus were saying the κολοβοί cut their penis and/or glans off, he would just say that. He would not say it is a more severe cut of the thing that is trimmed in circumcision, which is the preputial structure (*posthē*-and-*akroposthion*), leaving only the *posthē*.

Similarly, Strabo talks about the "Troglodytes," some of whom have "mutilate[d] [κολοβοί] their bodies," and "some of them [who] are circumcised [περιτετμημένοι], like the Egyptians" (*Geogr.* 16.4.17; cf. 16.4.5 [LCL]). Although he mistakenly thinks Jews practice female circumcision too (16.4.9), he nevertheless views the Jews as circumcisers (cf. αἱ περιτομαί in 16.2.37), not κολοβοί like the Troglodytes.

This is corroborated by the fact that the type of circumcision the Egyptians practiced, which both Diodorus and Strabo use as their referent, was similar to *milah* in that the *posthē* remained afterward. While *milah* excised the

<sup>49</sup> Pierre Cordier, "Les Romains et la circoncision," *REJ* 160 (2001): 337–355, esp. 343; see also, Moorthy, "Seal," 57.

circular ridged band on the *akroposthion* (the overhanging tip of the preputial orifice), “[t]he Egyptian procedure involved either the excision of a triangular section from the dorsal [upper] face of the foreskin or simply a longitudinal incision along the median line of the dorsal face allowing retraction of the foreskin and exposure of the glans.”<sup>50</sup> Egyptians practiced a form of circumcision that is mostly identical to modern day preputioplasty. That is, to facilitate easier retraction of the preputial skin down past the corona, a perpendicular cut is made to the ridged band on the dorsal side so that it can no longer contract and close when it overhangs the glans. Significantly, when looking at two different preputial cuts, Diodorus names the one that removes less skin “circumcision” and the more severe kind as “mutilating” (ἀποτέμνω, *Bib. Hist.* 3.32.4). This is the same word (ἀποτέμνω) Philo uses in *Spec.* 1.3 (cf. ἀκρωτηριάζω in 1.3, 9). The simplest reason Philo speaks about “miserable pains,” “mutilating,” (ἀποτέμνω) and “maiming” (ἀκρωτηριάζω) is that he is intentionally talking about a similar severe form of genital cut known to Diodorus and Strabo. This is supported by the fact that, especially considering the “precise terminology” of the Greeks,<sup>51</sup> Philo repeatedly uses ποσθία, thereby implying that circumcision removes the entire preputial foreskin-structure rather than just the *akroposthion*.

Furthermore, when one considers the extensive measures involved in “ensuring that no tissue remained that might facilitate the successful accomplishment of *meshikhat orlah* [i.e., epispasm],” then Philo’s wording was not an exaggeration if he was talking about a procedure at all similar to *periah*.<sup>52</sup> Since the *posthē* is fused to the glans at birth (and usually up to puberty and sometimes beyond),<sup>53</sup> as Rubin highlights, this means the *mohel* for *periah* has “to force the removal of as much tissue as possible, both foreskin [*akroposthion*] and mucosal tissue [*posthē*], so as to preclude the stretching of vestigial [*posthē*] tissue in a process of decircumcision.”<sup>54</sup> This process of removing the entire preputial structure by tearing off the *posthē* from the glans and cutting it (m. Šabb. 19:2, 6) involves a lot more pain—requiring either a knife or fingernails to scrape off the fused *posthē*<sup>55</sup>—than a mere single excision that removes the overhanging *akroposthion*. When describing Samaritan circumcision, John Mills notes, “The most painful part of the ceremony as performed by the Jews—the rent [i.e., the rending of the entire fused *posthē* in *periah*—is never done by

<sup>50</sup> Richard C. Steiner, “Incomplete Circumcision in Egypt and Edom: Jeremiah (9:24-25) in the Light of Josephus and Jonckheere,” *JBL* 118.3 (1999): 503. Although Cox and Morris do not identify Egyptian circumcision with preputioplasty (I think mistakenly), they nevertheless classify it with what we are calling *milah* (their “Type 1a”) in contrast to other forms such as *periah* (their “Type 1b”) (“Why Circumcision,” 246, 251–252).

<sup>51</sup> Hodges, “Ideal Prepuce,” 377.

<sup>52</sup> Rubin, “*Brit Milah*,” 95.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Cohen, “Tractate Sabbath,” 423, 425.

<sup>54</sup> Rubin, “*Brit Milah*,” 94.

<sup>55</sup> Rubin, “*Brit Milah*,” 92.

the Samaritans. ... they ... call it a superfluous cruelty.”<sup>56</sup> Moreover, *periah* also involves a longer and more arduous recovery time as is evidenced by comparing the recovery times between modern circumcisions, which remove most of the *posthē* like *periah*, and preputioplasty, which appears to be exactly what the Egyptians practiced and is very similar to *milah*.<sup>57</sup> It is thus most probable that Philo has in mind a severe kind of circumcision, a proto-*periah*.

In contrast to the Rabbis who, as argued above, advocate for *periah* to make *akroposthion* regeneration physically impossible (perhaps so that the covenant cannot be broken), Philo seems to have advocated for this severe circumcision for moral-ethical reasons (which the Rabbis never mention) and never mentions circumcision as having anything remotely to do with covenant concerns. In *Spec.* 1.1–11 it is clear that removing the ποσθία “guarantees... the excision of the pleasures, which bewitch the intellect... the excision of excessive and abounding pleasure” (1.8–9).<sup>58</sup> That is, for Philo, circumcision is not merely

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<sup>56</sup> Mills, *Three Months*, 190.

<sup>57</sup> For tissues removed in modern Western neonatal or adult circumcisions, see Sorrells Morris L. et al., “Fine-Touch Pressure”; Glick, *Marked*, 5–6, 149–214.

<sup>58</sup> Philo talks about circumcision as “a guarantee of two of the most indispensable things” (σύμβολον ἡγοῦμαι τὴν περιτομὴν δυοῖν εἶναι τοῖν ἀναγκαιοτάτοις) (*Spec.* 1.8), the first of which is the “the castration of the pleasures” (1.9). It is important to note that the word σύμβολον is potentially a false cognate in English. “Symbol” does not quite capture what σύμβολον conveys. According to LSJ (s.v. “σύμβολον”), a σύμβολον is a “guarantee” or “proof” of something. Whereas the English word “symbol” conveys a metaphor, σύμβολον is a stronger term. This is evidenced when Philo refutes extreme allegorizers in *Migr.* 92–93, where he again calls the laws σύμβολα. If σύμβολον meant “metaphorical,” then the literal keeping of the laws would be otiose. This is precisely what Philo is arguing against, namely, a *metaphorical* understanding of the laws! Philo is not merely asserting that the literal laws must still be kept for no other reason than that he says so. Rather, Philo is mounting a vigorous counterargument by urging a different view of the laws that is more robust than a mere metaphor that attends only to an “inner meaning.” Philo is, in effect, saying, “Do not be like those who think these are ‘metaphors’ or ‘symbols.’ No, these are σύμβολα. And precisely *because* they are σύμβολα the literal keeping of them cannot be neglected.” The fact that Philo thinks it is the actual “keeping” (φυλάσσω) of the laws that makes possible the true knowledge “of which these are σύμβολα” (93) means that we need to think of σύμβολον more in terms of something that *accomplishes* that which it signifies (akin to a “treaty” or a “contract,” LSJ, s.v. “σύμβολον”). Philo’s entire polemic against the extreme allegorizers depends upon an *inseparable connection* between literally keeping the law and the inner meaning and significance of the law. The word σύμβολον seems especially equipped to convey such a connection. The first definition given for σύμβολον in LSJ is a “tally, i.e. *each of two halves or corresponding pieces* of an ἀστράγαλος or other object, which two ξένοι, or any two contracting parties, broke between them, each party keeping one piece, to have proof of the identity of the presenter of the other.” It is thus likely that Philo chooses σύμβολον because he wants to communicate that one cannot have “one half” (i.e., the “deeper sense”) *without* the “other half” (literally keeping the law).

metaphorical, it is physically effective as it “suppresses the undue impulses of the male,” which is why only males are circumcised (QG 3.47 [LCL]).

Philo’s insistence “that morality could be surgically engineered” through circumcision coupled with the fact that the Greeks and Romans fetishized the *akroposthion* and *posthē* further suggests that Philo promotes (proto-)periah.<sup>59</sup> As Hodges demonstrates, “[i]n the domain of pleasures ... the longer prepuce often serves as the object of erotic interest and as a signifier of the sexually attractive male.”<sup>60</sup> But it was not simply the protruding prepuce (i.e., the *akroposthion*) that was a symbol of erotic pleasure, the *posthē* was as well. Hodges relates:

The eroticization of the prepuce is also evident in the *Thesophoriazusae* of Aristophanes, where the lusty father-in-law, pressing to his face a garment owned by the young and handsome poet Agathon, exclaims: ‘By Aphrodite, this has the pleasant smell of [a little] prepuce [πόσθιον]!’ The diminutive *posthion* (πόσθιον), as opposed to the standard word *posthē* (πόσθη), is most likely used here as a term of endearment.<sup>61</sup>

Given the fetishizing of the *posthē* and *akroposthion*, Hodges believes Philo’s “dismissal of opposition to circumcision as ‘childish mockery’ (*Spec.* 1.3) betrays his failure to understand the philosophical and aesthetic underpinnings of the Greeks’ high regard for the cultivation of physical health and beauty.”<sup>62</sup>

I think the precise opposite is going on, however. Philo understands the Greco-Roman eroticization of the *posthē* and *akroposthion*, and this is precisely why he promotes a severe circumcision that removes the ποσθία. In Greco-Roman society, the *posthē* and *akroposthion* symbolized the pleasures, and Philo agrees. He says, “all the other [pleasures]” are embedded in erotic pleasure, which is “the most forcible” (*Spec.* 1.9; cf. QG 3.46–48; *Migr.* 92–93) and that “the flesh of the foreskin, symboliz[es] those sense-pleasures and impulses” (QG 3.52 [LCL]). The Greeks may have been aware of this only intuitively for apparent reasons, but modern studies show that the ridged band and the *posthē* are the most innervated, erogenous, and sensitive tissues of the penis.<sup>63</sup> Thus, *periah* “circumcision ablates the most sensitive parts of the penis.”<sup>64</sup> Also, since *periah* necessarily exposes any leftover mucosal inner skin as it gets rolled down past the corona, this skin undergoes keratinization or

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<sup>59</sup> Hodges, “Ideal Prepuce,” 388.

<sup>60</sup> Hodges, “Ideal Prepuce,” 379.

<sup>61</sup> Hodges, “Ideal Prepuce,” 379; his brackets.

<sup>62</sup> Hodges, “Ideal Prepuce,” 387.

<sup>63</sup> Winkelmann, “The Erogenous Zones,” 40–41, 46; Winkelmann, “The Cutaneous Innervation”; Sorrells Morris L. et al., “Fine-Touch Pressure.”

<sup>64</sup> Sorrells Morris L. et al., “Fine-Touch Pressure,” 864.



“epithelialization, eventually taking on the character of an outer skin covering.”<sup>65</sup> The body produces a buildup of keratin to desensitize the mucosal tissue so that what was once *inner* skin can now tolerate being on the *outside* indefinitely.

Therefore, not only does Philo use the correct vocabulary, he also has a motive. It appears Philo wants to excise the enfleshed representation and source of Greco-Roman pleasure by removing the whole *posthē*-and-*akroposthion* structure. To make his point explicit, he says that circumcision “is the excision [ἐκτομῆς] of pleasures, which bewitch the intellect ... the excision [ἐκτομὴν] of excessive and abounding pleasure, not only of one [pleasure], but through the most forcible one also of all the others” (*Spec.* 1.9) precisely because the ποσθία/ποσθένη (1.4, 5, 7) is “excised,” “mutilated,” and “maimed” (ἐκτομή, ἀποτέμνω, ἀκρωτηριάζω) (*Spec.* 1.3–5, 7, 9). As repugnant as a typical Greek would find circumcision of any type, Philo feels about Greek sexuality. Thus, not only does the *akroposthion* need to be removed, but the “excessive and abounding” remaining skin of the *posthē* must also be severed. This is why Hodges concludes, “Circumcision for Philo was a surgical means of obtaining moral objectives through a deliberate numbing, desexualization, dis-invigorating, and uglification of the body.”<sup>66</sup>

In fact, although Philo usually allegorically interprets eunuchs as barren of virtue, he explicitly endorses castration to curb the passions.<sup>67</sup> He writes that “it is surely better to be made a eunuch [ἐξευνουχισθῆναι] than to be raging after illicit sexual unions” (*Det.* 176). Again, “to become a eunuch would be the best thing, if our soul, by thus escaping wickedness, will be able to unlearn passion” (*Leg.* 3.236). Therefore, it seems safe to suspect that Philo errors on the side of removing as much prepuce as physically possible, given his vocabulary surrounding circumcision and endorsement of actual castration.

Finally, Diodorus and Strabo provide further evidence for Rubin’s argument that *milah* was by far the most common practice of Jews until the second century AD, for if the Jews were known for anything like *periah*, then these writers would not have hesitated to call them mutilators as they both do with the Troglodytes. In other words, if Jews were known for a more radical preputial cut, then they most likely would have been characterized as κολοβοί, not περιτεμνόμενοι. Indeed, that (a) Strabo views Jewish and Egyptian circumcision in the same category versus more severe types of circumcision that both Strabo and Diodorus consider to be mutilation, and (b) Egyptian circumcision was very similar to *milah*, in terms of leaving ample *posthē*,

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<sup>65</sup> Rubin, “Brit Milah,” 88.

<sup>66</sup> Hodges, “Ideal Prepuce,” 387–388.

<sup>67</sup> Ra’anan Abusch, “Circumcision and Castration under Roman Law in the Early Empire,” in *The Covenant of Circumcision: New Perspectives on an Ancient Jewish Rite*, ed. Elizabeth Wyner Mark (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2003), 80–82.

indicates that Philo is advancing a very minority view for Jews *at the time*—though it became the customary circumcision practice near the time of Hadrian.

### 5. Paul Opposing Philonic Beliefs and Practices

Paul's opponents in Galatians are advocating for circumcision to "perfect themselves in the flesh" (σάρκι ἐπιτελείσθε) (Gal 3:3). Also, this "perfection" is specifically about mastery over the "desires" (ἐπιθυμίας) and "passions" (παθήματα) of "the flesh" (5:16, 24) and they seem to think circumcision is effective for those ends. This is because receiving circumcision is the subject of 5:1–15, and then Paul turns to say that walking in the Spirit (5:16) and belonging to Christ crucifies the passions and desires (5:24; cf. 5:16–26), all of which strongly suggests that the crux of the disagreement is over how best to remedy the passions and desires—through circumcision or through Christ and the Spirit. That is, Paul is arguing against what Peder Borgen calls Philo's view of "ethical circumcision."<sup>68</sup>

Thinking that circumcision has an effect on ἐπιθυμίας and παθήματα is peculiar to Philo; indeed, it is not until the twelfth century with Maimonides that this view resurfaces in Judaism.<sup>69</sup> And, while there is insufficient space to get into it here, just about every bit of Paul's argument in Galatians can be read as a point for point rebuttal of views only found *together* in Philo (e.g., circumcision as moral surgery, enslavement to the στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου, Law as a παιδαγωγός, allegoresis of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Hagar, and Ishmael, etc.).<sup>70</sup> It is worth pausing, however, to observe that Philo explicitly links becoming δίκαιος and possessing δικαιοσύνη by doing "works" (*Det.* 18) and that one merits blessings by doing the "works" of the Law (*Praem.* 126)—the very issues at stake in Gal 3. Philo comments that the command in Deut 16:20 "to pursue justice justly" (δικαίως τὸ δίκαιον διώκειν [LXX uses διώξη]) is "so that we might follow after justice [δικαιοσύνη] and every virtue by means of [doing] the works akin to it [τοῖς συγγενέσιν ἔργοις αὐτῆς]" (*Det.* 18). Concluding his comments on the blessings in Deuteronomy, Philo offers this summary: "These are the blessings invoked on behalf of good people, who fulfill the laws by works" (αὐταὶ μὲν αἱ ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀνθρώπων τῶν ἀγαθῶν εἰσιν εὐχαὶ καὶ τοὺς νόμους ἔργοις ἐπιτελούντων) (*Praem.* 126; see ἐπιτελέω in Gal 3:3; for other instances of "works" and "Law[s]" see *Praem.* 82, 119; *Mos.* 2.48; *Abr.* 5).

On account of these observations, what I mean by *Philonic* is that the opponents referenced in Galatia evince a curious similarity with the beliefs and

<sup>68</sup> Peder Borgen, "Observations on the Theme 'Paul and Philo': Paul's Preaching of Circumcision in Galatia (5:11) and Debates on Circumcision in Philo," in *Die Paulinische Literatur Und Theologie: The Pauline Literature and Theology* (Århus: Forlaget Aros, 1980), 88, 91, 92, 101.

<sup>69</sup> Cohen, *Jewish Women*, 143–173; Borgen, "Observations," 96–97.

<sup>70</sup> Ernest P. Clark, "Enslaved Under the Elements of the Cosmos" (PhD diss., University of St Andrews, 2017).

practices that together are distinctive to Philo's corpus: e.g., surgically engineered morality via circumcision and calendar observance to become δικαιοσύνη and merit blessings rather than curses.<sup>71</sup> By *Philonic* I mean only that the distinct material in Galatians matches well with the distinct material that makes Philo "Philo." Moreover, Philo is also our best witness that (proto-)periah was practiced by a minority of Jews in Paul's time when *milah* was the norm. This background enables one to discern from Paul's polemics that he is arguing specifically against the Philonic belief in the ethical efficaciousness of circumcision and the concomitant practice of *periah*.

To avoid "parallelomania," what frequently matters most with comparative studies according to Samuel Sandmel, is "a restricted area which makes each of these groups distinctive within the totality of Judaism; it is the distinctive which is significant for identifying the particular, and not the broad areas in common with other Judaism." <sup>72</sup> Therefore, since what Paul is arguing against matches the "distinctiveness" <sup>73</sup> that makes Philo "Philo" over against his Jewish contemporaries, this study avoids "parallelomania" and instead proceeds with the exact type of comparison Sandmel argues is worth pursuing; namely, interrogating connections when the overlap concerns markedly "distinctive" views relative to "other Judaism."

Even though the "passions and desires" only appear in Galatians, the other (distinctive) commonalities between Galatians and Philippians 3 (discussed further below) suggest that the "dogs" in Phil 3:2 are likewise concerned with the passions. In fact, the accusation that their "belly" (κοιλία) is their god in Phil 3:19 may very well be an ironic rebuke of their obsession to curb their bodily appetites. Paul takes this obsession to be a form of idolatry. Philo says that we find "pleasure" (ἡδονή) "in the breast and belly [κοιλία], where anger and desire [ὁ θυμὸς καὶ ἡ ἐπιθυμία] are, portions of the irrational: for in the irrational is to be found alike our faculty of decision and the passions [ἡ κρίσις ἡ ἡμετέρα καὶ τὰ πάθη]" (*Leg.* 3.116; cf. Plato, *Resp.* 9.588c–591b). In my reading, Paul is saying that his opponents are so obsessed with their bodily appetites that they effectively worship them even while trying to dull them. (This is corroborated when we look at what kind of circumcision they promote below.)

If Paul is dealing with Philonic opponents, it makes sense that he would find this new type of circumcision baffling, not only for its attendant belief in surgically engineered morality but also because it is halakhically novel given the

<sup>71</sup> On Philo's general view that the Law is aimed at controlling the passions, desires, and pleasures see, e.g., *Spec.* 2.163; *Praem.* 119–124; *Migr.* 93. That the Jewish calendar is effective to this end, see *Spec.* 2.39–214 (esp. 2.39, 145, 150, 160, 195). On Sabbath, see *Spec.* 2.60–64; *Mos.* 2.210–216; *Decal.* 98–101; *Migr.* 91. On the food laws, see *Spec.* 4.91, 96–97, 100, 118.

<sup>72</sup> Samuel Sandmel, "Parallelomania," *JBL* 81 (1962): 1–13, esp. 3.

<sup>73</sup> Sandmel, "Parallelomania," 4; cf. 3.

large amount of flesh removed. Modern day Samaritans critique *periah* precisely on this latter point. Samaritan high priest Jacob ben Aaron writes:

But circumcision with us means only the cutting off of the foreskin [i.e., the *akroposthion*]. The Jews make an addition to what God has commanded; for their *hacham*, ‘doctors,’ make necessary the removal of a larger portion of the skin than the prepuce [i.e., removing the *posthē*], sometimes denuding the phallus, which they call *perih*, which does not correspond with the circumcision known in the Hebrew language as *nemileh*. We do not practise this as the Jews do, for we think theirs is an addition to the divine command, and has not been revealed as such.<sup>74</sup>

Coordinating our insights thus far with some of Paul’s statements in Galatians and Philippians, Paul reveals he likely had a similar attitude.

### 5.1. *Proselyte Opponents*

Scholarship has long been aware of the similarities across Romans, Galatians, and Philippians 3:1–21 due to the concentration of similar distinctive themes (e.g., works, faith[fullness], justification, righteousness, Law, circumcision, athletic metaphors, etc.). No matter how one identifies Paul’s opponents in these epistles (e.g., Jewish, Jewish-Christian, proselytes, etc.), scholars tend to identify these opponents, if not as the same people, then as espousing the same unique set of beliefs and practices.<sup>75</sup> Here it suffices to highlight a few key observations in Galatians and Philippians as an exercise demonstrating how knowledge of *milah* and *periah* illumines Paul’s polemics.

The idea that Paul is opposing proselytes rather than born-Jews or Jews *qua* Jew in Phil 3 and Galatians can be observed from a few angles. Beginning with Philippians, there is a marked difference between Paul’s polemics against fellow Christ-evangelists in chapter 1 and against the “dogs” in chapter 3. For instance, Paul acknowledges his animosity with other evangelists in 1:15–18. He says that while some preach Christ from “goodwill” and “love,” others are doing it from “jealousy,” “strife,” and “selfishness,” “not sincerely,” but “expecting to cause affliction” for him (1:15–17). Despite this, Paul emphatically says: “whether by pretense or by integrity, Christ is proclaimed, and I am rejoicing in

<sup>74</sup> Jacob ben Aaron, “Circumcision Among the Samaritans,” trans. Abdullah ben Kori, *BSac* 65 (1908): 697.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Douglas A. Campbell, *Framing Paul: An Epistolary Biography* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 133–146, 156–157; Douglas A. Campbell, *The Deliverance of God: An Apocalyptic Rereading of Justification in Paul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 883–899; B. J. Oropeza, *Jews, Gentiles, and the Opponents of Paul: Apostasy in the New Testament Communities* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012), 136, 208–211.

this. Yes, and I will continue rejoicing” (1:18). These cannot be the same people he mentions in 3:18–19 who he says are “enemies of the cross of Christ” that he “weeps” over. The former preach Christ so Paul can rejoice even though they are personal enemies of his, but the latter are enemies of Christ, and that is why Paul weeps.

The likelihood that the opponents in Phil 3 are proselytes of some kind comes into sharp relief when juxtaposing Paul’s comparison of himself to them and how he compares himself to the “super-” or “pseudo-” “Apostles” in 2 Cor 11 (vv. 5, 13).<sup>76</sup> With respect to the super-Apostles Paul is equal to them in being a Hebrew, an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, and a servant of Christ (11:22–23). What distinguishes Paul, however, is the amount of suffering he has endured as a servant of Christ (11:23–33), thereby embodying Christ-Crucified (12:9–10; cf. 4:7–12; 6:4–10). The problem Paul is facing in 2 Corinthians is over apostolic style and authority, not circumcision and justification as he is dealing with in Phil 3.

The similarities between 2 Cor 11 and Phil 3 serve to accentuate significant differences between them. In Philippians, the opponents are similarly “putting confidence in the flesh” (Phil 3:3; cf. 2 Cor 11:18). But whereas as in 2 Cor 11 Paul is simply matching the boasts of the super-Apostles only managing to surpass them in sufferings, here in Phil 3 Paul is outpacing his opponents with everything he lists. He fronts his list with the assertion that what he is about to name constitutes “more” (μᾶλλον) reasons “to put confidence in the flesh” (3:4). That is, Paul thinks his being *born* a Jew, circumcised on the eighth day of the biological stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, and a Pharisee puts him far above whoever it is he has a problem with (3:5). The point of Paul’s list is that these “dogs” (3:2) cannot make similar claims. They cannot claim an eighth-day circumcision. They cannot claim to come from one of the twelve tribes of Israel. That is, they are proselytes, or, as Karl Barth humorously phrased it in his commentary on Philippians, they are “zealous fresh-baked Jews.”<sup>77</sup>

If Paul was trying to outdo other Christ-evangelists, then we can reasonably expect him to list all the suffering that went along with Christ-service as he did in 2 Cor 11 (cf. 2 Cor 4–6; Phil 1:12–20, 29–30). He also likely would have acknowledged that they claim to be servants and preachers of Christ (cf. 2 Cor 11:13, 23; Phil 1:15, 17). Instead, he calls them “enemies of the cross of Christ” (3:18), which Paul uses as an epithet for outsiders (Rom 5:10; 11:28; cf. Col 1:21; 2 Thess 3:15).

<sup>76</sup> For other arguments on why the opponents in 2 Corinthians are not the same as those in Phil 3, Romans, and Galatians, see Campbell, *Framing*, 142–146.

<sup>77</sup> Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Philippians: 40th Anniversary Edition*, trans. James W. Leitch (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 96; Also, Kenneth Grayston, “The Opponents in Philippians 3,” *ExpTim* 97.6 (1986): 171.

With respect to Galatians, the evidence that Paul is dealing with proselytes can be seen in the precise way he distinguishes between the noun περιτομή and the verbal forms of περιτέμνω. The crucial text is the present participle περιτεμνόμενοι found in 6:13a. A form of περιτέμνω is used in 2:3; 5:2, 3; 6:12, 13b and refers to (potential) proselytes in every instance. The noun περιτομή, however, is used in 2:7, 8, 9, 12, and undoubtedly refers to born-Jews in these passages. The use of περιτομή in 5:6 and 6:15 also refers to a sociological group vis-à-vis another: the foreskinned (ἀκροβυστία).<sup>78</sup> When Paul wants to refer to born-Jews or baptized-born-Jews he uses περιτομή. When he wants to talk about proselytes receiving circumcision, he uses a verbal form. Therefore, the use of the present participle in 6:13b is likely the same. It refers to non-Jews who are undergoing proselyte circumcision and trying to pressure others to do the same. The participle is in the present to emphasize these are not born-Jews but relatively recent “fresh-baked” proselytes.<sup>79</sup>

## 5.2. *Paul Opposing Periah*

Since these opponents are, in all likelihood, proselytes attracted to circumcision for moral reasons and because Philo is our only witness to this view “that morality could be surgically engineered” through circumcision,<sup>80</sup> then they have likely had significant influence from somewhere that shares this distinctive Philonic belief. And, if what was argued earlier about Philo and *periah* is considered, then these proselytes probably underwent *periah*, and thus we should expect this to be acknowledged in Paul’s polemics. This is what we indeed find.

Paul’s wish that “those who are troubling you” “will also amputate themselves [καὶ ἀποκόψονται]” (5:12) likely “expresses a polemic against the practice of *periah*.”<sup>81</sup> From Paul’s perspective where *milah* is normative, a *periah*-like cut would be novel, and since it is quite severe in the amount of preputial skin removed, Paul would understandably be shocked (just as the Samaritans still are). In this interpretation, Paul is saying: “They are taking off so much flesh already so I wish they would cut all the way down and amputate

<sup>78</sup> Gal 5:11 also has περιτομή, but here it refers to the rite of circumcision itself as the object of proclamation.

<sup>79</sup> For similar arguments about the present participle περιτεμνόμενοι in Gal 6:13, see Johannes Munck, *Paulus Und Die Heilsgeschichte* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1954), 79–81; Matthew Thiessen, *Paul and the Gentile Problem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 96; A. E. Harvey, “The Opposition to Paul,” in *Studia Evangelica: Papers Presented to the Third International Congress on New Testament Studies Held at Christ Church, Oxford, 1975: Part I: The New Testament Scriptures*, ed. F. L. Cross, vol. 4 of *TUGAL* 102 (Berlin: Akademie, 1968), 321–332; more cautiously, Peter Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church*, SNTSMS 10 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 85, 87–88, 97.

<sup>80</sup> Hodges, “Ideal Prepuce,” 388.

<sup>81</sup> Moorthy, “Seal,” 221.

their penis.” Paul is perhaps aware of the Philonic endorsement of making oneself a literal eunuch to curb one’s passions. He is taunting his opponents to keep going and amputate themselves if they are so obsessed with dulling their sexual desires. In any case, in their zeal to cut off “the flesh with its passions and desires” (Gal 5:24; cf. 5:16), the proselytes seem to have submitted to a severe form of circumcision that removes the entire flesh of the (fetishized) foreskin-structure, but in doing so they have “mutilated” and “maimed” themselves (to use Philo’s words ἀποτέμνω and ἀκρωτηριάζω in *Spec.* 1.3, 9) and are thus in danger of being counted among the ἀποκεκομμένος who are not allowed into the covenant assembly (Deut 23:1 LXX; cf. ἀποκόπτω in Gal 5:12).

Turning to Phil 3, although Paul’s description of the opponents as τὴν κατατομήν (Phil 3:2) is often taken as an ironic rebuke of Jews and Judaism in general and “refusing to allow the name circumcision to the Jewish rite,”<sup>82</sup> this is likely a simple way of describing the procedure of *periah* at a time when it was not normative and thus lacked a specific designation. As noted above, Diodorus and Philo use ἀποτέμνω (Philo also uses ἀκρωτηριάζω) to describe the more severe preputial cutting involved, but Paul is clearly drawn to using a wordplay between κατατομή and περιτομή.

Paul’s wordplay, however, is not meant to disinherit all unbaptized born-Jews from belonging to “the circumcision,” whom he explicitly says cannot be disinherited (Rom 11:28–29; cf. 15:8).<sup>83</sup> Also, the fact that κατατομή is missing in all of Paul’s other references to unbaptized Jews, esp. Rom 9–11, and that he consistently refers only to born-Jews as “the circumcision” (e.g., throughout Galatians and Rom 15:8; cf. Col 4:11) makes this idea that Paul is trying to disinherit all unbaptized born-Jews doubtful. Knowing about *milah* and *periah*, however, makes the notion that Phil 3:2–3 is meant to contrast two types of circumcision that map onto *milah* and (proto-) *periah* the simplest explanation. On the one hand, *milah* cuts “around” (περί); it excises the ridged band, removing the *akroposthion*. On the other hand, *periah* tears down (κατά) the inner mucosal skin so that the corona is fully exposed and all remaining “shreds” of the preputial skin are cut off (m. Šabb. 19:6, 2). Likely, Paul is simply making clear the type of cut being performed. Paul thinks the opponents are advocating for a form of circumcision that cuts too far down; hence κατατομή, which would remove the *posthē*.<sup>84</sup> Paul may also intend κατατομή to have the connotation of “mutilation” as the NRSV takes it (“those who mutilate the

<sup>82</sup> Grayston, “The Opponents,” 170 (Grayston does not hold to this view, but this is a fair summary of the view of the majority of NT scholars, which Grayston is opposing in his own way).

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Andrew Remington Rillera, “Paul’s Philonic Opponent: Unveiling the One Who Calls Himself a Jew in Romans 2:17” (PhD diss., Duke University, 2021), 234–245.

<sup>84</sup> Moorthy likewise understands κατατομή “to suggest that which is cut down” (“Seal,” 222; her emphasis).

flesh”) especially if Philo and Diodorus’s vocabulary and Gal 5:12 are kept in view.

In any case, given the cumulative evidence discussed, the primary reason for this word choice is probably to describe a group of people who “cut down” instead of “cut around.” More specifically, it refers to a particular set of opponents, who are ostensibly proselytes, by giving them an epithet that poetically describes their unique surgical practice as something distinct from what he considers to be the proper mode of circumcision since it cuts “down” instead of “around.”

Since Philo is the only one we have evidence for who advanced this form of circumcision at this time for moral reasons, it is likely that those who “cut down” are doing so for similar reasons. It strains credulity that this unique preputial procedure, paired with the distinctive Philonic belief that circumcision has a moral effect on the passions, also coincidentally appears in Paul’s letters and is similarly paired with concerns about the passions of the flesh. The hypothesis that Paul is opposing Philonic (proto-) *periah* plausibly explains Paul’s charge in 3:19 that this obsession over curbing their appetites is akin to worshipping their bellies. It would explain why he talks about an alternative route to being “perfected” (Phil 3:12) as he did in Gal 3:3 and that perfection is only possible in the eschaton (cf. Gal 5:5), not now, let alone through genital surgery.

I also suspect there is something more going on with the epithet “dogs” (Phil 3:2).<sup>85</sup> This is because the Greeks used “dog” (κύων) as a euphemism for the penis and also for the sexually aroused, erect, penis with an exposed glans (hence the word κυνοδέσμη [“dog leash”] for the leash around the foreskin that ties up the “dog” from being exposed).<sup>86</sup> In the context of speaking about genital surgery, this meaning of κύων would be unmistakable to a Greco-Roman audience. The context makes the association inescapable. This is what would happen when Paul used κύων in Phil 3.

It is also important to realize that the Greek word for “having an erection,” ψωλός, is also used simply for an exposed glans whether or not an erection is present. This is why an exposed glans is the source of ridicule and shame.<sup>87</sup> That is, a male can be rendered ψωλός through *lipodermos* or through

<sup>85</sup> See also, Ryan D. Collman, “Beware the Dogs! The Phallic Epithet in Phil 3.2,” *NTS* 67 (2021): 105–120.

<sup>86</sup> Hodges, “Ideal Prepuce,” 382. He quotes from the second-century grammarian Phrynichus Arabius who writes that “the people of Attica ... call the penis *kyon* [dog].” Cf. “κύων, dog, usually stands for the male member (Hsch.). In Pl Com 174.16 *κυνί τε καί κυνηγέταιν*, dog and dog-drivers, refer to the phallus and the testicles, and the *νοχ κυνέπασαν* (*κύν’ ἀνέσπασαν*?) = *ἀναστῦψαι*, cause to be erect (Poll. 2.176), at CA 1057 is a pun glossed by Hsch. as meaning *ἐξέδειραν*, that is, excite oneself into having an erection” (Jeffrey Henderson, *The Maculate Muse: Obscene Language in Attic Comedy*, 2nd ed. [New York: Oxford University Press, 1991], 127).

<sup>87</sup> Hodges, “Ideal Prepuce,” 392–393, 405.



circumcision if they do not make use of a fibula or a κυνοδέσμη, or if these malfunction, as in the case of Menophilus, leaving the glans exposed (Martial, *Epigr.* 7.82).<sup>88</sup> Thus, no matter if a male is aroused, when they have an exposed glans for whatever reason they can be mocked as if they were aroused.<sup>89</sup> Although with *milah* one has enough remaining slack *posthē* to cover up the glans if they so desired through infibulation or a κυνοδέσμη, this is physically impossible with *periah* (figs. 3 and 4). From a Greco-Roman perspective, therefore, *periah* is equivalent to a permanently aroused state (ψωλός) because their “dog” (glans) can never be “leashed.” Therefore, I take it to mean that “dogs” in Phil 3:2 is more than a simple pejorative (i.e., Paul is saying more than “these folks are unclean animals”). It is Paul using sexually vulgar language purposefully and ironically. The best way, then, to translate the vulgarity in Paul’s expression would be to render κύων into an equivalent modern slang with an explanatory gloss: “Beware of the upright cocks.” (And scholars thought Paul’s use of σκύβαλον in v. 8 was vulgar!)

This use of “dog” would again further explain Paul’s polemic in 3:19. From the (Philonic) perspective of these opponents, undergoing *periah* has a noble purpose: to control one’s passions and desires by maiming the organ that serves the most enslaving desire of all: sexual lust. But, because of what this physically does to the penis by permanently exposing the glans, Paul can use the notion of ψωλός to ironically shame them. Martial makes a connection between lustfulness and Jewish circumcision (*Epigr.* 7.55; 11.94), and Tacitus also stereotypes the Jews as lustful (*Hist.* 5.5).<sup>90</sup> Tacitus is likely basing this on their being circumcised (which he mentions immediately after their lustfulness and says is the distinguishing feature of Jews), which results in an exposed glans even for *milah* (absent something like infibulation or a κυνοδέσμη) because the physical mechanisms to keep the remaining *posthē* covering the glans (the ridged band and frenulum) are cut. Therefore, turning back to Philippians, by the κατατομή attempting to curb their passions in *this* manner of cutting down, Paul is playing up the reality that their genitals will *always* look as if they are aroused by capitalizing on κύων’s association with ψωλός. This is why he says their “glory is their shame” (Phil 3:19). They glory in their shame because what they think makes them “upright” in the sense of righteous really makes them “dogs”—“upright” in the sense of permanently aroused and therefore shamed. Their very attempt to curb their desires (what they see as their glory) is the source of their shame because they will look perpetually aroused, especially since

<sup>88</sup> Hodges, “Ideal Prepuce,” 392–394.

<sup>89</sup> Troy W. Martin, “Whose Flesh? What Temptation? (Galatians 4.13-14),” *JSNT* 21 (1999): 65–91, esp. 88–89.

<sup>90</sup> For more on how the Romans conceptualized the Jews as chronically aroused on account of circumcision, see Cordier, “Les Romains,” 347–350, 352, 354.

they have removed the *posthē* and thus any means to “leash” their “dog” with a κυνοδέσμη.<sup>91</sup>

Furthermore, I agree with Thiessen that when Paul says, “every person who undergoes circumcision is obligated to do the entire Law [ὅλον τὸν νόμον]” (Gal 5:3) that Paul is likely intending “the phrase ὅλον τὸν νόμον to refer to the entirety of the law of circumcision, not the entirety of the Jewish law.”<sup>92</sup> This is because Jubilees uses a similar phrase precisely regarding the law of circumcision in 15:33: “the Israelites will prove false to *this ordinance*. They will not circumcise their sons in accord with *this entire law*” (my emphasis).<sup>93</sup> Thiessen also observes that a synonymous phrase appears in Deut 24:8 LXX “where it means the entirety of the one specific commandment” being discussed (i.e., leprosy).<sup>94</sup> It says that Israel “shall be very watchful to do according to all the law [ποιεῖν κατὰ πάντα τὸν νόμον]” (NETS). Thus, in Gal 5:3, Paul is likely saying, “unless one performs the entirety of the law of circumcision, one has in fact not kept that law.”<sup>95</sup> Although I disagree with Thiessen that Paul thinks any circumcision post-eighth-day is invalid,<sup>96</sup> it seems that Paul would likely think a *periah*-like cut violates the law of *milah* circumcision in Gen 17 akin to the Samaritan point of view cited earlier.

This would also explain another curious statement that “those who are undergoing circumcision [οἱ περιτεμνόμενοι] do not keep the Law themselves” (Gal 6:13).<sup>97</sup> If Paul intended to say that born-Jews do not keep the Torah (because it is too hard or it is just an ontological impossibility), then his comments about his own blamelessness with respect to the Torah pre-Christ make no sense (Phil 3:6) as well as the fact that he assumes his peers kept to the

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<sup>91</sup> This is not to say that Paul agreed with the Greco-Roman perspective that any showing of the glans equates to arousal. It is only to say that Paul is capitalizing on this idea for his own polemical agenda against these Greco-Roman proselytes.

<sup>92</sup> Thiessen, *Gentile Problem*, 93.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. Thiessen, *Gentile Problem*, 93.

<sup>94</sup> Thiessen, *Gentile Problem*, 93.

<sup>95</sup> Thiessen, *Gentile Problem*, 93.

<sup>96</sup> Thiessen, *Gentile Problem*, 92. The Samaritans were inflexible about eighth-day circumcision, and yet, despite this stringency, Samaritans still welcomed proselytes and would circumcise them upon conversion! In fact, “In his book *De Mensuris et Ponderibus*, Epiphanius of Salamis relates that both the Samaritans who converted to Judaism and the Jews who became Samaritans were, respectively, required to undergo a second circumcision, thus attesting to the mutual negation of the other group’s practice” (Rubin, “*Brit Milah*,” 95; cf. Pummer, “Samaritan Rituals,” 658–659). But Thiessen does not acknowledge this fact. The Samaritans’ willingness to accept proselytes and circumcise them well past the eighth day suggests, to use E. P. Sanders’ famous phrasing, that the eighth-day ordinance in Gen 17:12, 14 is about “staying in” rather than “getting in.” The Samaritans prove that being obstinately fixated on eighth-day circumcision only applies to those born to covenant members and in no way is a hindrance to the conversion and circumcision of outsiders.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. Thiessen, *Gentile Problem*, 95–96.

Jewish ancestral traditions even if he was more zealous than they were (Gal 1:13–14). Rather, Paul is likely saying that these proselytes are not even keeping the law of circumcision because they cut off too much flesh, and this violates the law of circumcision in his view.

## 6. Conclusion

This discussion has shown how knowledge of *milah* and *periah* is significant for illuminating both Philo's view of circumcision as well as Paul's polemics against circumcision in Galatians and Philippians. Paul's context in these letters is one of combating moral and ethical (Philonic) circumcision, and there is evidence that proto-*periah* was also involved. This reframes Paul's polemics from being against Jews or circumcision *per se* to being a more contingent and occasional polemic against a distinctive Philonic belief and practice at the time.

According to Paul, the opponents' position in Galatians and Philippians cannot be more ironic. They are trying to be Law-observant, but by undergoing proto-*periah* they are breaking the law of circumcision. They are trying to control their passions, but by undergoing proto-*periah*, they will always look as if they are permanently aroused, destined to serve their appetites in shame.