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Collective Degradation: Slavery and the Construction of Race

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Ham and Noah: Sexuality, Servitudinism, and Ethnicity

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For over two millennia an encounter of particular complexity and contradiction has been puzzling readers of the Bible. The problem is not merely exegetical or theological. In eighteenth and nineteenth century Euro-America, Genesis 9:18-27 became the Curse of Ham, a foundation myth for collective degradation, conventionally trotted out as God's reason for condemning generations of dark-skinned peoples from Africa to slavery. In prior centuries Jews, Christians, and Muslims had exploited this story for other purposes, often tangential to the later peculiar preoccupation. How and why these many uses differed and what the consequent discontinuities and continuities suggest about the human condition is the subject of this paper.

Few can retell the encounter between Noah and his sons without marveling at its surprising twists and turns. Noah and his sons disembark from the ark. Noah plants a vineyard, drinks of its wine, and gets drunkenly exposed in his tent. His son Ham, who in unique contrast to brothers, Shem and Japhet, is identified by a filionymic, Ham father of Canaan, witnesses his father and reports to his brothers. Entering with heads averted to avoid gazing upon the sight, they cover their father's nakedness and retreat. When Noah recovers, he knows what "his little son has

done to him" and curses Canaan, that son of Ham, with being enslaved to his "brothers". Shem and Japhet receive blessings whose details also contain mysteries. The questions are plural and by the nature of Scripture none can have a singular answer. Why was Canaan cursed when Ham did it? Who is the "little son"? And what did he do to Noah? Why is Ham given a filionymic? What precisely is the meaning of the curse and blessings Noah dispenses? And finally how did Jews, Christians, and Muslims eventually make Ham into an African slave?

Today's paper does not answer everything, since it must leave something for the book I am finishing, *Sex, Slavery, and Racism: The Secret History of Noah and His Sons*¹, but I can present the three interrelated prisms of interpretation through which this passage has been understood: sexuality, servitudinism, and ethnicity. Simply put, my argument is that according to the Bible, unmastered sexuality leads to enslavement and enslavement in turn constructs ethnic identity. Key is the foundational centrality of Genesis 9:18-27 in the history of the justification of slavery, that is servitudinism, a term that I believe deserves infamy of place next to both its fellow-traveler, amelorationism, and its distinctly different and much later opponent, abolitionism. Biblical servitudinism, albeit until recently neglected by ancient historians, has been much more coherent, influential, long-lived, and far-reaching than the Aristotelian argument of slave by nature. That much ballyhooed warhorse, as it evolved in Euro-American thought, was in truth a biblical wolf in a Greek sheep's clothing.²

¹ Under contract with Alfred J. Knopf.

² For the argument that Aristotle and the Greeks were not the only pro-slavery game in the ancient town, Peter Garnsey, *Ideas of Slavery from Aristotle to Augustine*, Cambridge, UK, 1996. Garnsey's claim has been accepted by the authoritative Richard Kraut, *Aristotle, Political Philosophy*, OUP, 2002, p. 278, n4. Earlier Arnaldo Momigliano in an insightful but all too brief essay on Moses Finley underscored the latter's almost willful neglect of the biblical and rabbinic sources on ancient slavery, despite his ability to mine this literature, Arnaldo Momigliano, "Moses Finley and Slavery: A Personal Note", in Moses I. Finley, ed. *Classical Slavery*, London, 1987, 2.

Some have asserted that Aristotle's discussion of slavery is weak and contradictory.³ The weakness is evident in the tautological formulation: A human being belonging by nature not to himself but to another is by nature a slave. The natural character that determines one's status is defined by being in that status. Aristotle's natural slave theory lacked a convincing and consistent explanation of precisely what intrinsic qualities and characteristic actions caused that status in the first place. He did, however, make two efforts: 1) the distinction between the apprehension and the possession of reason, mere possession being not good enough; 2) the assertion that one whose nature is defective has a body that rules the soul, a condition that is "poor and unnatural".⁴ With regard to the first, beyond suggesting that either facility alone marks humans off from animals, he fails to clarify precisely what is so powerfully different between these two uses of reason that one or the other determines the crucial status of freedom or slavery. The soul-body imbalance is a claim that might have yielded an interesting line of reasoning, but it is left dangling.

As if perhaps to acknowledge the inadequacy of these formulations from Book One, in Book Seven towards the end of the *Politics*, he revisits the question with yet another claim, which contradicts the first.⁵ Abandoning attempts to base enslavement either on the precise variant of the deliberative reason that as a whole distinguishes humans from other animals or on the body-soul relationship, he suggests that it is a matter of spirit. Surprisingly here it is spirit not reason that makes one free. The people of cold regions, particularly Europe (i.e. the hinterland to the north,

³ Nicholas D. Smith, "Aristotle's Theory of Natural Slavery", in *A Companion to Aristotle's Politics*, ed. David Keyt and Fred D. Miller, Jr., Oxford, 1991, 142-155, a revised version of the earlier article published, *Phoenix, the Journal of the Classical Association of Canada*, 37(1983), 109-122. For a review of Smith and other critics, see Kraut, 278-9, n. 5. Kraut, who does not share these objections, constructs an argument more powerful than what Aristotle actually stated, to a degree unjustified in my opinion. As an example of the contradictions that Kraut ignores see Garnsey, 115 particularly n. 11 and 118.

⁴ Book 1, chapter 5, 1254b1-2, as translated in Aristotle, *Politics Books I and II*, Trevor J. Saunders, tr. & ed., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995, 6.

⁵ Book 7, chapter 7.

the Balkans and beyond, excluding Greece) possess the requisite spirit and therefore are free, but they lack thought and art. The people of Asia (i.e. the hinterland to the east, Ionia, Asia Minor, and Persia) possess intelligence and the skill of political administration, but they lack spirit. Therefore they are subjects, ruled, and enslaved.

The context of each discussion may mitigate the inconsistency. At the beginning of the *Politics*, slavery is in the household. Towards the end of *Politics*, slavery is part of Macedonian-Persian rivalry and propaganda. His conclusion here that the Greeks being neither of Europe nor of Asia but mid-way between⁶ -- *obiter dicta* a challenge to the modern bromide of European or Western Civilization -- allows him to claim that they possess the best of both and therefore have freedom as well as skill and intelligence. This simple-minded chauvinism founded a topos that was well developed in Islamic ethno-geography and later expounded in early modern European geo-humoral theory, the ideal geographical middle. As it evolved over the millennia, the only constant difference lay in where the best resided, e.g. Arabs and Persians between Slavs and the Sudan, England between the Arctic and the Equator, etc. There was however an important obstacle to transforming this into a base for race. According to Hippocrates, Aristotle and most of those after him, collective traits and capacities ultimately were a function of the geographical environment.⁷ You are where you live and you change when you move. Geographical determinism started to diminish only in the era of exploration and exploitation, though even later Montesquieu, Samuel Stanhope Smith, and most recently, David Landes, have still held to forms of it. The hereditarian counter-attack played a major role in the construction of race from the sixteenth century on, as will become clear below.

⁶ Aristotle's views on this subject were in fact inconsistent, *Physics*, V. 1, 224^b21-2, as cited in Kraut's commentary, *Politics Books VII...*, 92.

⁷ In fact what actually appeared in the Hippocratic corpus was more nuanced and complex.

Within the *Politics* the contradiction between the two arguments is so stark that we must consider that Aristotle, though using the same Greek term, *doulos*, was in fact discussing two different institutions that he had troubling distinguishing, domestic slavery as opposed to political subjection.⁸ But such is the corrosive effect of servitudinism and its inevitable ideological distortions that his inconsistency and confusion should not surprise. Peter Hunt has demonstrated the eagerness of Greek historians to blind themselves to the importance of military slaves in defending supposedly free citizen-run Greek societies.⁹ Philosophers too shared this fault. Thesias was not the only blind Greek seer.

Aristotle's designation of the so-called Asian as the model slave and the so-called European as the model freeman illustrates how all-encompassing is the self-delusion that is the justification of slavery. The accumulated evidence, such as it is, suggests that to the inconsistent extent that any single group predominated as slaves over time, Europeans, by Aristotle's definition, were more likely to assume that role.

Accordingly Peter Garnsey has argued that the true function of the Aristotelian argument was "to distract attention from the existence of those unnatural slaves by promoting a paradigmatic image of the 'real' slave whom all could agree to be properly enslaved." It "offered ideological support to slaveowners rather than prescriptions for or descriptions of actual master/slave relationships".¹⁰

Be all of this as it may, a crucial determinant of influence remains: when was Aristotle's *Politics* available? The vexing problem of the Aristotelian corpus is beyond the confines of my

⁸ Kraut (290-295) resolves these contradictions in an unconvincing fashion by ignoring the "spirit" crucial to the different status of each and focusing instead on the creative-deliberative qualities. See also Aristotle, *Politics Books VII and VIII*, Richard Kraut, tr. & ed., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997, 93-94.

⁹ Peter Hunt, *Slaves, Warfare, and Ideology in the Greek Historians*, CUP, 1998

¹⁰ Garnsey, 126-7.

talk, but as we all know the authentic works of Aristotle recovered in the high Middle Ages had been lost more than a millennium earlier. By that late date, the Aristotelian argument for slavery may have been little more than a useful pagan fall guy for the servitudinism that was already deeply rooted in the Judeo-Christian-Muslim tradition itself. As two authorities on ancient Greek thought have argued, even without him and based solely on appeals to sacred texts, slavery already had a strong case.¹¹ Throughout the millennia the Bible was far more widely available and influential than Aristotle. There is significant evidence that the sexual servitudinism to be revealed here was recognized and embellished by the earliest readers and writers of the Bible and its continuators, Jewish and Christian. Later however it came to be exoterically undermined, particularly by the Fathers of the Church and by the *Ulema* of Islam, because of the theological constraints their respective and distinctive beliefs in Jesus as God Incarnate and Muhammad as the Perfect Prophet imposed upon them. For centuries nonetheless it maintained a hermetic existence. Finally in the nineteenth certain defenders of slavery revived it.

I. SEXUALITY

The first of the three prisms has been the least understood because its foundation has been the most aggressively denied by the dominant Christian-Muslim tradition. This denial unfortunately made it difficult to expose the deep and insightful basis of biblical servitudinism. Nonetheless I would argue based on a range of sources -- Mesopotamian tablets, intra-biblical exegesis, obliquely the earliest expansions of biblical story, as well as rabbinic and patristic comments -- that what was done to Noah was some kind of sexual violence, most likely anal intercourse. Who did it was less important than what it was. Accordingly in Genesis 9, Canaan and Ham were repeatedly intermingled.

¹¹ Contrast Kraut, p. 278, n.4 citing Garnsey to John Francis Maxwell, "The Development of Catholic Doctrine Concerning Slavery", *World Justice* 11:3 (March 1970), 315-316, blaming Aristotelianism and other pagan influences.

Rape

A collection of tablets, the so-called Mesopotamian sex omens, more or less contemporary -- between 1000 - 700 before the current era -- to the supposed origin of this strand of the Bible, espoused the principle that how you do it determines what would become of you. As an illuminating parallel to Genesis 9, the omens detail the significance of anal intercourse in the power politics of sex: "If a man has sex *per anum* with his social peer, that man will become foremost among his brothers [my emphasis] and colleagues."¹² By penetrating Noah and then boasting about it to the brothers, Ham/Canaan could assert power not only over his father, but also over his brothers. How fitting a punishment that instead of the mastery the Mesopotamians offered, the Bible's riposte was slavery. Chapters later within Genesis, rape is once again tied to Ham and his descendants, through the rape of Dinah daughter of Jacob, by the Hamite/Canaanite Shechem son of Hamor -- note the pun. It was this passage from Genesis 34 that the Talmud used centuries later as a proof text for the rape in Genesis 9. Noah is not the only victim of rape in the Bible. In the very next chapter after the rape of Dinah, her brother Reuben spies his father's concubine and cannot resist the prey (Genesis 35:22).¹³ The Israelite Reuben may seem a surprising proponent of uncontrolled sexuality, but, as we shall later learn, the Israelites may not be so radically different from the fate and indeed identity of the Canaanites. The other major parallel to Genesis 9 is the long list of sexual prohibitions in Leviticus 18 -- including acts

¹² In the context social peer might mean freedman as opposed to slave. Ann Kessler Guinan, "Auguries of hegemony: The Sex Omens of Mesopotamia" *Gender and History*, 9 (1997), p. 469; for a slightly different translation see Albert Kirk Grayson and Donald B. Redford, *Papyrus and Tablet*, Englewood, N.J., 1973, p. 149

¹³ These three episodes, targets of opportunity, differ from the similar incident of Lot and his daughters which took place with malice of forethought. In order to repopulate a world they feared had been completely destroyed in the devastation of Sodom, they got their father drunk and lay with him (Genesis 19:30-38). These incestuous union produced two of Israel's other neighbors, Moab and Ammon. Lot, in contrast to Noah, did not know what had been done to him.

perpetrated against both Noah and Jacob's concubine -- which are there characterized as the sexual perversions typical of two Hamites, Egypt as well as Canaan. Egypt is not only another son of Ham, as detailed in the Noahide family tree of Genesis 10, but also, according to the Psalmist, identical to Ham (78:51, 105:23, 106:22). Canaanites and their ilk were made the biblical byword for sexual randiness.

Castration

Although Greek myths and their embellishment by Freud et al. would make castration the default in almost any interaction between father and son, neither the Bible nor the literatures of the ancient Near East as a whole would agree. Freud's castration fixation reveals his fraught internalization of the Hellenistic-Christian campaign against circumcision that assaulted Germanic Jewry more than any other during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Here Freud is exposing the neuroses of his moment rather than revealing an eternal human condition.¹⁴ His confusion of circumcision with castration is as absurd as the notion that to shave a beard is to cut a throat. Male circumcision has been the norm for both monotheism and the ancient Near East which created it. It was a commonplace in Pharaonic Egypt.¹⁵ Islam as well as Judaism practice it. The odd man out, Christianity, in Hellenizing that tradition, rejected it.

¹⁴ Gary Taylor, *Castration, an Abbreviated History of Western Manhood*, New York : Routledge, 2000 for a different approach to historicizing this problem from its ancient Near Eastern and Greek origins to contemporary Euro-America.

¹⁵ Herodotus 2.36, 104-5. This passage has received much attention in the culture wars over Afrocentricity since it has been used to claim Egyptian settlement in the Black Sea region close to Greece (e.g. Mary Lefkowitz, *Not out of Africa, How Afrocentrism Became an Excuse to Teach Myth as History*, NY:Basic Books, 1996, 13ff). Neither side has acknowledged what is most noteworthy, that Herodotus argues for a cultural (e.g. specifically the practice of circumcision, linen weaving, speech and life-style [ἡζοηπααα]) rather than ethnic/racial definition of Egyptian-Colchian identity and that he notes that dark-skinned peoples are found elsewhere. While Herodotus is representative of a significant strand of non-racial ancient Greco-Latin thought, other Greeks and Romans did construct what were to become in the social-economic contexts of later centuries one of the building blocks for racism. For more on this see my "Black Skin/White Skin in Ancient Greece and the Near East", *Micrologus: Nature, Sciences and Medieval Societies*, to appear in 2004. (I apologize for my difficulty in including Greek accent marks.)

Ham/Canaan did not castrate Noah in the Bible, but by about the year 180 one early Greek Church Father reported that he might have. The Father was a Bishop, Theophilus of Antioch, but the other sources betrayed Jewish influence and even the Bishop's usage suggests a Jewish origin.¹⁶ Theophilus in dismissing the idea did not explain why Noah was a eunuch, but the Rabbis did. They were debating what had happened to Noah in the tent. Citing that story of the Hamite/Canaanite Shechem, one Rabbi insisted that Ham had raped his father.¹⁷ By contrast, the Rabbi who argued for castration, cited no proof text, to be expected since it is absent from the Bible, but instead spun a tale that built upon the instinct for power-grabbing selfishness through sexual violence present in the Mesopotamian parallel. Ham castrated his father because he had reason to fear that he would procreate again, siring at the very least a fourth son, thereby diminishing Ham's share of the world. Furthermore the language used in arguing for castration, punningly recalled rape. The object of Ham's hypersexuality was not only Noah. Previously, according to another rabbinical legend, in violation of Noah's explicit command of abstinence during the Flood, Ham did it with his wife on the ark.¹⁸ Another interpretation claimed that Ham

¹⁶ Theophilus of Antioch, *Ad Autolyicum*, tr. R.M. Grant, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970, pp. 124-5, book 3:19. Theophilus' pun, Ἐυνουχον, "EuNouchon -- eunuch" works only with the Hebrew, *Noach*, rather than the Greek, *Noe* for Noah. Louis Ginzberg instances two additional sources, the Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitiones* and the *Book of Adam*, which I have yet to locate, Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, Philadelphia, 1925, 5:191.

¹⁷ *Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin*, 70a. See also Albert J. Baumgarten, "Myth and Midrash: Genesis 9:20-29", *Christianity, Judaism and Other Greco-Roman Cults: Studies for Morton Smith at Sixty*, Leiden: Brill, 3:70-??; Franco Bolgiani, "L'Ascesi di Noé", *Forma futuri: Studi in onore del cardinale Michele Pellegrino*, Turin: Bottega d'Erasmus, 1975, 295-333; and Stephen Gero, "The Legend of the Fourth Son of Noah", *Harvard Theological Review*, 73 (1980), 321-330.

¹⁸ Genesis Rabbah, 36. 7; Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin, 108b. According to the Midrash and Talmud respectively, Ham was punished either metaphorically by getting burnt or by having an unusually colored son (presumably Kush). However the precise meaning of each phrase is difficult to establish. For more see my "Sons of Noah" *W&MQ*, 129-30, n. 60.

The Midrash on Genesis, compiled in Palestine, notes that there was one other guilty of concupiscence, a dog. The Talmud, compiled in Babylonia, has two, a dog and a raven. The linkage of the three in the Babylonian text may be a reference to much older Babylonian phrases: "in the mouth of a dog" or "in the mouth of a crow", meaning to abandon a child to slavery. And indeed the Talmud refers to the raven's mouth. The Akkadian for crow, *aribu* may be etymologically related to the Hebrew for raven,

had in fact committed incest, by raping his own mother. Clearly rape was the original interpretation. Castration emerged only later.

In the rabbinic expansion of the Bible this was not the earliest, nor the only indication that Noah was damaged goods. As Noah and his zoo were disembarking, a lion -- for reasons unspecified -- mauled the patriarch, mangling his penis so that when later he lay with his wife, he could not have proper intercourse and instead scattered his semen all over.¹⁹ The midrashic commentary on the Book of Leviticus asserts, in a manner implying that the matter was so well-known that it required no explanation whatsoever, that since Noah was lame, he was unsuited to perform the sacrifice to the Lord, and his son Shem took his place at the altar.²⁰ Physical integrity -- a human body without blemish -- was a requirement for participation in the Temple cult, a motif that was to be further developed in Christianity. Lameness was a common euphemism for eunuchy.

¹⁹ *orev*. I thank Mark Geller for this information. The phrase was derived from the ancient practice of abandoning or exposing in a pit or on the street unwanted infants, euphemistically styled: placing the infant in the mouth of one or the other beast. The consequence was most likely either death or enslavement. Joseph was exposed by his brothers in a pit. Recovered by passing traders, he was soon sold into slavery. Psalm 22:21MT/21:21V pleads to save "my only one [child?] from the hand of the dog", perhaps save my child from exposure or enslavement. Thus the Babylonian Rabbis, through Ham's co-concupiscents, may have been linking lack of sexual restraint to slavery. For the ancient practice and usage see Isaac Mendelsohn, *Slavery in the Ancient Near East*, NY: OUP, 1949, 5, and 131, notes 31 and 32, citing Landsberger, *Materialen zum sumerischen Lexikon, I. Die Serie ana ittisu*, I Tf. 3, col. III, 32-7, J.N. Strassmaier, *Inschriften von Nabuchodonosor*, 439, Oppenheim, *Bulletin of the American School of Oriental Research*, 91 (1943), 36-7 and Albright's note therein. Although there has not been much systematic effort to trace the transmission of ancient Babylonian culture to Jewish and other literatures of later periods, recently this ancient influence has received attention through the *Melammu* symposia, e.g. *Mythology and mythologies : methodological approaches to intercultural influences : proceedings of the second annual Symposium of the Assyrian and Babylonian Intellectual Heritage Project*, ed. R.M. Whiting, Helsinki : Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2001 and the work of the Finnish Assyriologist who has animated the effort, Simo Parpola. Of course it has long been recognized that the Flood stories of the Bible and of the Gilgamesh epic are closely related. I am grateful to Peter Machinist for these last references.

¹⁹ Genesis Rabbah 36. 4.

²⁰ Leviticus Rabbah, 20.1, echoing Genesis Rabbah, 30.6. Similarly in some manuscripts of Genesis Rabbah 36.3, according to a variant Noah's eunuchy is taken for granted with a sly aside.

Clearly Ham/Canaan were incidental players, merely more hooks on which to peg Noah's inability to procreate, but why should that issue attract such surprising and repeated comment? A fully documented response would require more attention than this conference can afford, but since Noah's sexual equipment -- as opposed to Ham's racial identity -- is to play a major role in patristic consideration of this passage, as I will shortly argue, it cannot be ignored. In brief, drawing upon oblique references scattered across early rabbinic literature²¹, I argue that Noah's sterility, whatever its cause, was important evidence in a polemic about mass celibacy that I have reconstructed within the Jewish community. This emerged with particular urgency in the aftermath of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, the end of the Jewish commonwealth, and the failure of the rebellions to restore it. Some urged that refraining from procreation was a proper sign of mourning at such devastation. Not coincidentally celibacy was also an issue that eventually was to divide the various followers of the Jesus cult from other Jews. The standard rabbinic proof text against celibacy was the thrice invoked divine commandment, "be fruitful and multiply", first voiced during the creation (1:22), repeated to Adam and Eve (1:28) and, after the Flood, to Noah and his sons (9:1). All but one who heard this procreative imperative, heeded it. The one rebel was also "a righteous man who walked in the ways of the Lord" (Genesis 6:9), the only one -- along with family and animals -- to merit salvation from universal diluvian destruction. If Noah failed to procreate, despite the command, then it must not mean what the procreationists claimed. Their exegetical retort was to demonstrate that Noah was not disobedient. He would have, if he could have, but he couldn't.

Sexual Oblivion

²¹ An exceptionally positive statement about abstinence occurs in a mishnah composed in light of the destruction of the Temple: *Mishnah Sotah* 9.15, but note the different attitude expressed in a later comment on this very text, Saul Lieberman, ed., *The Tosefta, The Order of Nashim, Sotah, Gittin, Kiddushin*, NY 1973, 3-4: 242-243.

Although Christianity and Islam transmitted and transformed many aspects of Noah's rabbinic story, sexual violence has been largely missing. Rather than merely an accident, this lacuna reveals something of greater significance, namely the theological constraints their respective and distinctive beliefs in Jesus as God Incarnate and Muhammad as the Perfect Prophet imposed upon them. For starters, neither shared with Judaism a post-Commonwealth polemic over celibacy. That difference could address the absence of castration, but not the absence of rape.²² The distinctive importance of Noah for each -- even greater for them than for Judaism -- does explain their reticence. They shared a scriptural base with Judaism, but, in addition, Noah was part of a chain of tradition that adumbrated respectively their God Incarnate or Perfect Prophet. According to Origen, Christ was Noah spiritual.²³ For Muslims, Noah was the archetype of someone whose message from God was at first rejected by his own community. Those who spurned him were destroyed, a key theme in the Quran, particularly during Muhammad's apocalyptic early Meccan period. As a predecessor to Jesus/Muhammad, Noah had to be perfect in every way.

The charge that Noah was damaged bore a particular problem for Christianity since if Christ was Noah spiritual, then Noah was Christ physical. And Christ physical was God Incarnate, fully, completely, and perfectly a male human.²⁴ Any suggestion that Noah had been violated or mutilated cast aspersions upon the incarnate perfection of Jesus Himself. Given such sensitivities, at the core of Christianity, it is no surprise that after Theophilus' off-hand and off-color comment, no Greek or Latin father -- as far as I can tell -- wrote on the subject until

²² A cult of castration did emerge among those Christians who took literally Mathew 19:12, Jesus' advocacy of "eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven". This represented a problem for the survival of the early Church that required rejecting the rabbinic hint that Noah too was a eunuch. For more on the appeal of castration, see Taylor, *Castration*, 185-209.

²³ Origen, *Homilies on Genesis* II.5.

²⁴ Leo Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

Raymond Martini, a Catalan Dominican, quoted the rabbinic interpretation in his 13th century polemic against Judaism, *The Sword of Faith, Pugio Fidei*.²⁵ The Syriac Fathers, who had more intimate contact with the Rabbis, with whom they did share a language and a milieu, did hint at the idea, but left it to the readers' imagination. While the Latin and Greek Fathers tried to ignore the subject, they could not completely avoid it. Jerome was forced to confront it when he translated the story of Noah and his sons into Latin. Through the tricks of translation -- too complex to be described here in detail -- he attempted to counter rape and castration. By his era, the early fifth century, they had already infiltrated the Greek translations in circulation; Theophilus's comment was also widely available; and the Eastern Christian allusions would certainly have been well-known in Palestine where Jerome then lived. In response the author of the Vulgate dampened any notion that Noah had been buggered and he resolutely affirmed that the Father of us all still had his *virilia* intact. He thus encouraged what was to become Christianity's lame interpretation of what Ham did.²⁶ He gazed upon Noah without respect. Ham mocked him. He knocked but did not knock up his father. While Jerome successfully squelched the charge of rape, keeping Noah intact required more than the word alone. And so Christian iconography was enlisted. From the earliest illustrated Bibles extant, the 5th century Vienna Genesis and Cotton Genesis, Christian artists exposed the very nakedness gazing upon which supposedly got Ham in trouble in the first place. They depicted Noah's genitals. This was a motif that remained a commonplace in Latin art until Michelangelo went over the top, flamboyantly uncovering Noah

²⁵ Raymond Martini, *Pugio fidei adversus Mauros et Judaeos / cum observationibus Josephi de Voisin et introductione Jo. Benedicti Carpzovi ; qui simul appendicis loco Hermanni Judaei opusculum de sua conversione...*, Lepizig, 1687, photo reprint, Farnborough, England, 1967, 932.

²⁶ Philo may have been the earliest to describe Ham's act as mocking, *De Sobrietate*, section 6, tr. F.H. Colson and G.H. Whitaker, London, 1930, 3: 446-7; Josephus *Jewish Antiquities*, Book I, 6.1.3 does assert that Noah was mocked, but he leaves vague the identity of the mocker, referring to him not by name, but as the "youngest of the children" implying that it might be Canaan, consistent with Jubilees 7:10-13. For more on this last source see below, pp. 32-33. In general, Philo and Josephus, Hellenistic Jews, exercised far greater influence over early Christian thought than on Rabbinic Judaism.

and his sons, genitals galore, on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. After Michelangelo, hardly any artist publicly exposed Noah again.²⁷

Christian exegesis worked at cross-purposes to Christian art. While the Fathers after Theophilus removed the hypersexuality and sexual mutilation, Christian artists reintroduced a hint of sexuality, but without explanation, a complex mixed message. As a result at least overtly and verbally the sexual element present at the creation of slavery was muffled, if not completely excised, mutilating the origins and intellectual history of servitudinism, even as visually it survived. Removed from the magisterial tradition, it gained attention during the Renaissance through growing Christian familiarity with rabbinic literature, but the path of its transmission was sensational rather than sober and considered. The most widely diffused version of the rape and castration of Noah in early modern Europe began life in an edition of newly discovered ancient pagan Babylonian documents.²⁸ It took more than a century for this fraud to be exposed. By then, lacking its various pedigrees, the story gradually insinuated itself into the arsenal of arguments employed during the nineteenth century defense of slavery.

II. SERVITUDINISM

In the history of slavery, biblical servitudinism, while certainly not ignored, has been underestimated for three reasons: 1) Stripped of its sexual component, the potency of its argument was diminished. 2) Particularly since the Enlightenment, Euro-American thinkers in general have privileged Greek over biblical influences. 3) Abolitionist triumphalism, predominant -- albeit

²⁷ See my "Michelangelo and the Curse of Ham: From a Typology of Jew-Hatred to a Genealogy of Racism", *Writing Race Across the Atlantic World: 1492-1763*, Gary Taylor and Phil Beidler, ed., New York, Palgrave Academic Publishing, in press, and on-line, http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/research/rapl/events/braude_abstract.html

²⁸ Giovanni Nanni of Viterbo, *Commentaria super opera diversorum auctorum de antiquitatibus loquentium* (*Commentaries on the Works of Various Authors who Spoke of Antique Matters*), Rome, 1492.

superficially -- in contemporary Christianity and Judaism, has rewritten the record to diminish the religious commitment to slavery²⁹, a salient example being the King James translation's emancipation of the Bible's slaves into servants. One casualty of religion's recently regnant revisionism about slavery is the otherwise brilliant and insightful *Slavery and Social Death* by Orlando Patterson which eviscerates its argument by ignoring the Bible. Unlike the religious debate over slavery that raged before the Civil War, the focus in this essay will not be the precise meaning of specific verses -- by and large that fight was won by the slavers -- but rather the narrative archetonic of Scripture and the insightful reasoning it exposes, for biblical story is psychology and philosophy.

More than a millennium and a half ago Augustine underscored the importance of the tale of Noah and sons. He recognized that it established the Bible's first institution after the Flood, slavery.³⁰ The encounter of Noah, Ham, and Canaan offers a primal psychological and theological narrative of servitudinism that inextricably linked together three core arguments. These, in varying combinations, came to be marshaled, explored, expanded, and exploded when the struggle over slavery later reached its crescendo. Those that could not mesh with racism were discarded.

1. Slavery was a means to exercise control over the morally undisciplined. In a brilliant stroke the exposure in the tent muddies the moral waters of victimhood. Who is the most aggrieved, the drunken father on whom some unspeakable act has been committed or the pervert who is punished with enslavement?

²⁹ For a recent effort to challenge abolitionist triumphalism, incorporating feminist perspectives and studies on the body, see Jennifer A. Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, OUP, 2002.

³⁰ Augustine, *City of God*, 19.15

2. Slavery was at its roots a domestic institution and a family affair. The narrative's victim (as opposed to the ultimate victim) was not simply the random target of sexual abuse, but the father and grandfather of the perpetrator(s?) and the punished. The ultimate slave masters were not simply random customers in the market place, but the "brothers" of the punished. To find slavery within the family drew upon these relationships as models of just legitimation, a powerful association that was to reverberate over the millennia.

3. Slavery's master-slave relationship was a natural extension of the most powerful dyads in Scripture, God-man and father-son. The role of paternalism in the justification of slavery raised the argument beyond the human family to the highest level, the patriarchal God. Securely anchored in the power of the father over his offspring, the curse appealed to and reaffirmed the cosmic order as well, for Noah was a righteous man who had walked in the way of the Lord. That a sexual challenge by son against father provoked the foundation of slavery grounded it all the more persuasively in the deep recesses of the male identity and role. The identification of God with father and father with master theologically and psychologically reinforced the superior rights of all three together, just as the identification of man with son, and son with slave securely subordinated them. In a world that suppressed and repressed matriarchy and the feminine in general, no more powerful set of dyads could exist.

The story reveals a penetrating insight into social and psychological reality, even as the tale of Ham tellingly distorts this truth. The relationship between master and slave does include an intimate sexual connection. Slaves were sex toys for masters and mistresses. The acts of Ham and his Canaanite offspring project onto the slave the lack of sexual self-control, or in Aristotelian terms, the unnatural dominance of body over soul as well as the absence of self-mastery. Such acts are in fact the master's prerogative. In the intimate setting of house and family where slavery originated -- the Greek translation makes Canaan not the literal "slave of slaves" or "lowest slave"

but rather "slave of the house"³¹ -- the Aristotelian argument is less powerful because it failed to present an explicit psychologically aware narrative such as the Bible's. The projection of the master's hypersexuality onto the slave was key to entrenching biblical servitudinism into Judeo-Christian-Muslim thought.³² It is this insight rather than any specific legal dictum that made the Bible's argument for slavery so knowing, powerful, and disturbing.

One commonplace is missing from the foregoing: the omnipresent practice that through enslavement prisoners taken in war escaped the death they deserved, a resolution that was not merely just, but indeed filled with mercy. However, implicitly, that convention is also subsumed in Genesis 9 through Noah's grandson, Canaan, the people whom the Israelites justly conquer to gain the Promised Land. The Canaanites thereby become the perfect slaves, slaves both by their uncontrolled sexual nature -- witness the rape of Noah, Dinah, and their legendary acts of sexual perversion scattered through the Bible -- and by the law of nations.

Word Games

But there is yet more to be ferreted out of the story. As noted earlier, Canaan first appears not on his own but as his father's son, Ham father of Canaan, a curious formulation, perhaps an allusion to the history of Egypt's fraught dominion over Canaan.³³ Over the centuries, Ham has been derived from many different words, the Hebrew for "hot", or "brown" (once

³¹ Literally "boy of the house" or "house-boy", Septuagint, 9:25.

³² Ilona Rashkow, *Taboo or Not Taboo: Sexuality and Family in the Hebrew Bible*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000, 95-104, from a Freudian literary perspective explores the idea that Noah -- in deed or fantasy -- raped Ham, rather than the opposite, but without pursuing its implications for slavery.

³³ Norman Karol Gottwald, *The tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250-1050 BCE*, Second Edition with a new preface, Sheffield, England : Sheffield Academic Press, 1999 (previously Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY, 1979), 390-400.

mistranslated as "black"), and most notably, the Egyptian KMT, for "black".³⁴ None of these is convincing. The most common, KMT, etymologically is not related to Ham, since the Egyptian equivalent of K is never transformed into the Hebrew H (*heth*).³⁵ A pun is possible, but if it were intended, its meaning would not be "black" qua ethnic group, but "black-land", meaning the country of Egypt, a name derived from the rich black alluvial soil of the Nile Delta, not the land of the blacks.³⁶ The Hebrew Bible and ancient Near Eastern literature in general -- in contrast to Greek and Latin -- have practically no color-based terms of ethnic identity.³⁷ On the other hand, a very different understanding of Ham yields a meaning that is consistent with the biblical context. Another Egyptian noun, closer to the Hebrew Ham, HM, can, depending on context, mean either majesty as in "his majesty" or servant/slave, an almost Hegelian recognition of the unity of master and slave.³⁸ Such an understanding explains the perplexing combination of servile and imperial fates awaiting the Hamites, be they subjugated

³⁴ Samuel Bochart, *Geographia Sacra, Phaleg*, Caen, 1646, Hebrew *Chum* ("brown") mistranslated as *niger* in index, signature ** iii, based on citing p. 8 a and 231 c, neither of which contain that definition. Philo may have been the first to link heat to Ham, a connection repeated by Jerome and Augustine, Philo, *Supplement: Questions and Answers on Genesis*, Book II, section 65, translated from the Armenian version of the original Greek, Ralph Marcus, Cambridge, 1971, 156, and *De Sobrietate*, section 44, 3: 466-7; Jerome, *Liber de Nominibus Hebraicis, Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Latina*, ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris, 1883), 23:col. 821; Augustine, *City of God*, Book 16, section 2. On Ham for Egyptian black see Jacob H. Hertz, *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs, Hebrew Text, English Translation and Commentary*, second edition, London, 1965, 36 and Cheikh Anta Diop, "Origins of the Ancient Egyptians," in *A General History of Africa, Ancient Civilizations of Africa*, ed. Gamal Mokhtar, Berkeley, 1981, 2:41-3 and the harsh debate it provoked among Egyptian and European scholars in the "Annex to Chapter I...The Peopling of Ancient Egypt", particularly 62-5, and 75.

³⁵ Yoshiyuki Muchiki, *Egyptian Proper Names and Loanwords in North-West Semitic*, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999.

³⁶ Herodotus, 2.12.

³⁷ See my "Black Skin/White Skin in Ancient Greece and the Near East", *Micrologus*, and "Primary Colors", Review Article, *William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, 59 (July 2002), number 3, 742-745, www.historycooperative.org/journals/wm/59.3/br_9.html

³⁸ Gary A. Rendsburg, "Word Play in Biblical Hebrew: An Eclectic Collection", in Scott B. Noegell, ed., *Puns and Pundits: Wordplay in the Hebrew Bible and Near Eastern Literature*, Bethesda, MD, 143-5. The argument is consistent with A.S. Yahuda, *The Language of the Pentateuch in Its Relation to Egyptian*, London, 1933, 267; A. Guillaume, "Paronomasia in the Old Testament", *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 9(1964), 282-90, especially 283; and Karel van der Toorn, "Ham" in Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst, ed., *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, Leiden, 1995, 728-9.

Canaanites or the great empires of Egypt and Kush in the Nile Valley and Nimrod in the Tigris-Euphrates. The Babylonian Sex Omens helped understand that in Genesis 9 Ham's power grab through buggery was fitly punished by the enslavement of his favored son so that he became far from "foremost among his brothers". Overstriving for dominance yields humiliation elsewhere in Scripture. Proverbs 16:18 reminds us, "a haughty spirit [i.e. majesty] comes before a fall [i.e. servility]" -- a consoling thought as Israel faced imperial enemies.

Canaan contains the root, *KN^C*, which can mean "be humble, low, subdued".³⁹ The first people slated for slavery were by definition already "subdued". Were the people of *kana^can* an actual people in fact so named, or a fictive literary device created to convey such a message, or a common noun referring to slaves or captives of varied origin, or some ambiguous combination of the above, for instance, an actual group of people whose name was punningly exploited as a religious-cultural paradigm of ideally anticipated subjugation? That Canaan -- in contrast to Ham -- did ultimately appear in extra-biblical inscriptions and documents of people in the real world does not gainsay the varied possible origins of the biblical uses to which Canaan was put.

The emerging consensus among scholars of the Bible about the relationship between Canaanite and Israelite identity argues against a clear ethnic distinction between them.⁴⁰ The Bible is rife with stories of Israelite-Canaanite intermarriage and attraction. They share a language and a script. After all, the Bible itself described Hebrew, the language of the Israelites, as the "language of Canaan" (Isaiah 19:18). The archeological research raising

³⁹ *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. Francis Brown, S.R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, Oxford, 1907, 488.

⁴⁰ George Mendenhall, "The Hebrew Conquest of Palestine", *The Biblical Archeologist*, 24 (1962), 66-87, an argument later developed by Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh*, 210-19, 489-92.

doubts about the stories of large-scale Israelite invasion and conquest has also revealed a unified material culture in ancient Palestine that fails to distinguish between two different warring peoples. What can be divined from the stories of the Bible is that, whatever the political, social, or economic impetus, the true distinction between the two is expressed through belief and worship. Worship in biblical idiom was simply another form of work, devotion, indeed slavery, meanings derived from the Hebrew root, ^cVD. Canaanites were the inhabitants of the land who worshipped, i.e. slaved for, the false gods and therefore deserved to be enslaved to those who worshipped, i.e. slaved for, the true God. The slaves of the true God justly enslaved the slaves of the false gods. Slavery to a false divine master -- that included rites of sexual abomination -- led to slavery to a human master. A Canaanite was most likely a potential Israelite who had become enslaved to false gods. And a Israelite was a one-time Canaanite who had abandoned slavery to a false master and thereby gained the "freedom" of worshipping/slaving for the true God.

Other Slaves, Sons of Shem Included

Although Ham, Canaan, and Egypt were the poster-boys for the hypersexuality that should lead to enslavement, the Bible had other candidates for the same fate, some quite surprising. One was an eastern neighbor of Canaan, the Midianites. Isaac's two sons, Esau and Jacob, succumbed in varying degrees, as did Jacob's descendants, the Children of Israel in Egypt. Lastly any Israelite male could run the risk of perpetual slavery. The boundary between free and slave as well as between Israelite and Canaanite was in fact far more porous than one might now imagine.

The story of the Midianites in the Book of Numbers distills the essence of biblical servitudinism, so much so that one leading critic has suggested that it represents a formulaic

interpolation inserted centuries later to justify the contemporary wars of that era.⁴¹ Moses launched a victorious campaign of annihilation against the Midianites because their women had wantonly seduced some of Israel into following a pagan cult. All the males and all females, except the virgins, were to be slaughtered. While spared, the virgins were condemned to slavery. Hypersexuality, war, and annihilation for all but those saved through slavery represented the Canaanite formula.

In a second example of the sex/slavery norm, the accursed blessing of Jacob/Esau by their father Isaac recalls the curse and blessings bestowed by Father Noah on his own heirs. Esau was also the patriarchal ancestor of another people, Edom, neighbors of Midian and Canaan, who were also to be subjugated by Israel.

The circumstances of Esau's fated servitude bear remarkable parallels to, as well as, significant differences from Canaan's. Both were rivals to Israel in the Promised Land. For both, slavery was determined through the words of a diminished and dying patriarch foretelling the fate of his offspring. The hung-over Noah blessed his sons and cursed Canaan before dying. Near his own death, the blind aged Isaac was tricked into blessing Jacob with the good fortune intended for his favored son, Esau. For both, slavery was to be a family affair: Canaan to "brothers", Shem and Japhet; Esau to his own brother, Jacob. Aggression and hunting were hallmarks for both. Hypersexuality was the charge against Ham and the Canaanites. Nimrod, Canaan's nephew, was a "mighty hunter before the Lord" (Genesis 10:9). Although Esau was not concupiscent, he did take Canaanites to wife. Indisputably, Esau was a rough-hewn hunter before his father. His mastery of killing and cooking game had made him Isaac's favorite.

⁴¹ Baruch A. Levine, *Numbers 21-36, A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, The Anchor Bible*, NY, 2000, p. 445.

Canaan and Ham were, by contrast, far from Noah's favorites. Esau's subjugation to his brother was determined not by a conscious curse, but by a series of ambiguous or botched fortunes. Strikingly unlike Canaan's, the fate intended, apparently for Esau, is voiced first by God. Only later does the patriarch become involved. The voicing of prophecy is cryptic and contradicted. First God speaks in response to mother Rebecca's plaint of pain caused by a rough and raucous pregnancy: "Two peoples are in your belly and two nations will be separated from your bowels. And one nation will dominate the other. And minor, major will serve"(Genesis 25: 23). Neither Esau nor Jacob is named. It is only with the last words that God hints as to who will serve whom. And even then their precise meaning does not emerge until the moment the twins leave the womb. Esau is the first, the major son. It is he who will become the slave to serve the minor, Jacob.

Such oracular divination plays itself out in Isaac's attempts at the blessings that ultimately fulfill the Lord's prophecy. Isaac intends to make Jacob the slave to Esau, but gets tricked into the reverse. When a trembling Isaac and a tearful Esau discover that Jacob has cheated both of them, the father, filled with anguished sympathy, attempts to make amends, but his second blessing, though close, cannot match the first. A faithful rendering is: "Behold, your abode shall be of the fat of the land and the dew of the heavens. And by your sword shall you live. But your brother shall you serve, until the time will come that you shall break loose and shake his yoke off your neck"(Genesis 27:39-40). The first lines of blessed bounty for Esau match Jacob's. The difference lies in the source of this bounty. For Jacob, it is God. For Esau, it is the dint of his own labors, for "by your sword shall you live." Isaac ends his fraught blessing of Esau with a prophecy that almost neutralizes Jacob's. Jacob is to lord over this brother given him as slave. But unto Esau is a different right, the first such right announced in the Bible, a right denied Canaan and the Midianite maid-servants. It is the right of the slave to

revolt. Like the last gift to spring from Pandora's box, the hope of insurrection was the last line of Isaac's blessing.

The accursed blessing is the topsy-turvy relation of twins, sibling rivalry *ab utero*, one barely victorious perhaps, gaining a dominance fated from its beginning for a violent end. The topsy-turviness of twins tumbling in the womb matches the topsy-turviness of mastery and slavery in the ancient world when the fortunes of war, the turn of a word or a trick, could transform captor to captive in a day. Jacob and Esau locked together in the womb recall the core of the Noah-Ham-Canaan complex, the unity of the master-slave dichotomy. The struggle of Jacob and Esau not only looks back to the first family after the Flood but also forward to Jacob's next adventure and to Israel's future encounter with Ham and Egypt at the end of Genesis. Why Genesis must make Jacob's fate so ambiguous is thus obvious. How confident can a full-throated prophecy of mastery be when neither he nor his descendants escape slavery? It would challenge faith in Scripture's God to miss what is to unfold when Jacob, to get the woman he desires, slaves for his uncle, and when he and his sons go down to the fate awaiting in Egypt.

Jacob, the First Hebrew Slave

Jacob's enslavement constituted something between indentured servitude and chattel bondage. In biblical usage, the Hebrew term *ʿeved* applied to both institutions. Moreover, the circumstances of his enslavement recall elements of Canaan's curse and Midian's fate.

To escape Esau's wrath and get a wife from other than the oversexed idolatrous Canaanites, Jacob is dispatched to Mesopotamia (Genesis 28-31). There he is to seek out the two daughters of his maternal uncle, Laban. As soon as he arrives he is smitten with the younger, Rachel, impulsively kissing her at their first meeting. So overwhelmed is he with

passion for this “shapely and beautiful” daughter that to gain her, he offers seven years of labor, “in his eyes but a few days because of his love” (Genesis 29:17, 20). When the term is up, Jacob frantically insists upon payment, “Bring my wife, for my days are filled. Allow me to come upon her.” (Genesis 29:21) The entire expression is a paradoxical combination of brutal politesse: the coarse assertion of the intensity of his desire, “come upon her”, introduced by the polite, “Allow me to”. The nuptial night arrives. Jacob consummates the union. Blinded by lust, only in the morning does he discover the bedtrick. The elder sister, plain Leah, has been substituted for the ravishing Rachel. Laban explains that it would be contrary to local custom for the younger to be wed before the elder, a sly hint at Jacob’s deceitful displacement of his own elder sibling. The ever-resourceful father-in-law now offers a second deal, another seven years of Jacob’s future labor in return for the near immediate delivery of Rachel. Jacob’s love's labor lust is now doubled. The consummate trickster has been out tricked.

However hard Jacob labors for Laban, during the second seven years he still finds time to sire twelve children by Leah, Rachel, and their respective maidservants, a procreative pace unmatched in Scripture. His obsession with sex and conception is not limited to the human animal. He dreams about goats doing it (Genesis 31:10-12). He also proves to be a skilled breeder of livestock, using his intimate knowledge of animal intercourse to gain the payment in kind – after six further years of service -- that Laban repeatedly tries to deny him (Genesis 30:31-43). Jacob pays a huge price for his randy ways, twenty years of barely compensated labor.

As a slave of lust, Jacob is like both Canaan and the Midianite women. For Jacob, like Canaan, slavery is a family affair. Thereby Jacob fulfills two of the three elements of the institution’s Noahic foundation: slavery as a means to control the morally undisciplined and slavery as a domestic family institution. His exceptional lack of sexual discipline prevents him

from bargaining properly for Rachel. Jacob's indiscipline reveals that he possesses the nature of a slave. What, perhaps, helps him escape the ultimate permanent fate is the absence of the third element, the God-Man, Father-Son, Master-Slave dyadic pattern, though he came perilously close to acquiring that as well. After all Father Isaac's intended blessing would have made Esau, master of Jacob, and Jacob, slave of Esau, a parallel to Noah's curse. As it turns out, even without Isaac's paternal word, Jacob still became, like Canaan, a slave to his uncle.

But was Jacob truly a slave or simply a hired hand, working the bride price out through his labor? While Jacob might dispute it and Scripture never so labels him, the decision, though split, leans against him. The authorities contrary to Jacob are Laban himself, his own wife Rachel, and biblical law whose concept of the permanent Hebrew slave nearly defines his status. Laban tells his nephew that he should not serve for free (Genesis 29:15). But then Laban proceeds to impose that very servitude for the first seven years, for practically nothing, an undesired payment, Leah. Only in return for a promise of seven more years does Jacob finally get his desire, Rachel. And only during the subsequent six years, is he supposed to be earning something for himself and his now huge family. Even then his uncle still treats him as a slave, striving not to pay (Genesis 31:42). What Jacob does earn is only achieved through sexual trickery, the manipulation of rods in front of ewes and she-goats *in flagrante delicto* so as to create on their offspring the unexpected patterns that mark his compensation. When Laban threatens to deny him even that, Jacob, at the Lord's behest, at last decides, in accordance not with his own but with Esau's blessing, that the time has come to break loose and shake the yoke off his neck. The uncle gives chase as one would a fugitive slave. When he finally catches him, Uncle Laban asserts that all Jacob has taken is stolen property: "The daughters are my daughters. The children are my children. The flock are my flock. All that

you see is mine” (Genesis 31:43). All that he has earned, were he a hired hand, is denied, for Laban still regards him as a slave. Only God's intervention with Laban and, as we shall discover, the last of the sexual tricks force Laban to allow Jacob to depart, life, limb, property, and freedom intact.

The Bible comes close to making Jacob's service the embodiment of the law of the permanent Hebrew slave, reinforcing the justice of Laban's attitude.⁴² After no more than six years of service -- note not the seven years of Jacob's labor -- to a fellow Israelite master, the slave is to be released (Exodus 21:2-6 and Deuteronomy 15:12-18). Should the master be a Gentile, the slave himself or his kin may buy out the contract even earlier (Leviticus 25:47-54). However if the slave insists upon keeping the wife his master gave him, he must become a permanent slave.⁴³ Laban's case for permanently enslaving Jacob was even stronger, because through the largesse of this master this slave had acquired not merely one wife, but two wives, two concubines, and twelve children.

The process through which the Hebrew slave becomes permanent alludes to the first element of the Noahic foundation as well as Canaanite-Midianite slavish behavior. The principal similarity is once again sex. The second similarity is idolatry, a minor motif throughout the discussion of Canaanite, Midianite and others to be enslaved. The slave's uxorious inability to prefer his freedom to the sexual satisfaction provided by a wife in this paradigm bespeaks a lack of sexual self-mastery. This I argue is evident through a close

⁴² Calum Carmichael, “The Three Laws on the Release of Slave (Ex 21,2-11; Dtn 15,1-18; Lev 25, 39-46)”, *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 112(2000), 509-25. For a different approach that summarizes the scholarship on both Jacob's service and the Hebrew slave, see Gregory C. Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, Sheffield, 1993, 226-255.

⁴³ This permanent status seems to trump the Jubilee year whose application is murky in the Bible and thereafter, see for example Jeremiah 34:8-20. Despite the obsession with noting the Jubilee year in the eponymous Book of Jubilees -- on which more below -- no mention of the emancipation of slaves appears. On the other hand the post-Commonwealth second century ce legal code, the *Mishnah, Kiddushim*, 1.2 does recognize it. Mendelsohn suggests that it was not enforced, *Slavery in the Ancient Near East*, 19.

reading of the laws of the Hebrew slave. Sex and idolatry, the sins of Canaan and the Midianite women, form the Bible's understanding of essential elements defining slavish character, elements so strong that they may even override the privilege and status of Israelite particularity.

The ceremony in Exodus which enslaves a Hebrew forever because of undisciplined sexuality resembles a ritual of denaturalization, of symbolically turning the Hebrew like a Canaanite, over to the gods of the Canaanites. The Hebrew can be translated: "And his master shall present him to the gods". As if to say, let them have him! Where are such gods found? The next phrase answers that question: "And he shall present him to the door, to the doorpost", where pagan household gods typically dwelt. What is to be done there? "And his master shall pierce his ear with an awl. And he shall be his slave for ever." Why the ear? Perhaps a reference to an ancient Mesopotamian practice of claiming property with the piercing of a nail and marking a slave on the mouth or ear?⁴⁴ That last allusion would be consistent with the entire Ham-Canaan complex that from the beginning has interwoven pagan motifs into its justification of slavery. The irony of such a ritual is that it mockingly reenacts a pagan practice that Israelite monotheism claims to reject.

The importance of the pagan household gods of the door post in the ritual of permanent enslavement is consistent with a strange detail in Jacob's escape from Laban. While Jacob is busy gathering his family and flock for the flight to his homeland, Canaan, unbeknownst to him, Rachel steals her father's *terafim*, the household gods or "idols". When Laban catches the fugitives, he upbraids Jacob for his thefts and stealthy escape, but mindful, as he admits, of the fearsome command he has received -- for God has intervened -- from the "gods" [sic] of

⁴⁴ V. Horowitz, "His Master Shall Pierce His Ear with an Awl (Exodus 21:6)", *Proceedings of the American Academy of Jewish Research*, 58 (1992), 47-77.

Jacob's ancestors, he speaks and acts warily to him. Though he has it in his power to do ill, literally "the god of my hand has it to do bad with you", he will not. Since clearly Jacob longs for the house of his father with its own gods, why, asks Laban, "do you steal my gods?" In other words, from Laban's perspective, the god of my hand has the power and right to harm you, Jacob. Your fathers' gods tell me not to do so. You are returning to your father's house (and gods), why do you need to take mine? Despite a thorough tent by tent search, Laban cannot find them. These powerful household deities cannot make themselves known and remain hidden by a trick. Laban fails because now it is Rachel's turn to outfox her father, again using the trick of sexuality that is a constant in Jacob's Mesopotamian career. Fearing that Jacob could be enslaved for ever, she hid them in her camel's saddle, plunked down and planted herself upon them during Laban's visit, with the excuse that she can not rise to receive her father because she was menstruating – the last of the bedtricks.

If the god of Laban's hand has such power, why does he need the other gods? Because although the god of the hand is the god of action, according to ancient Near Eastern practice in resolving disputes the god of the household is the god of property and possession.⁴⁵ For Laban to assert his ownership over his flock, his daughters, his grand-children, and his slave, Jacob, Laban must bring him before his household gods. Without the gods, there is no power of possession and Rachel knows this. She realized that Jacob's behavior had brought him to the brink of enslavement. Had Laban gotten his hands on the household gods, like the master of the uxorious Hebrew slave in Exodus, he could have kept Jacob forever.

Jacob's insistence upon keeping Laban's daughters and maid-servants, while still gaining freedom from avuncular service, comes perilously close to violating the legal norms of Exodus

⁴⁵ Ephraim Speiser, tr. and notes, *Genesis The Anchor Bible*, Garden City, N.Y. : Doubleday, 1964 p.250

and Deuteronomy. Laban's pagan identity, mockingly underscored by his devotion to the *terafim*, does perhaps save Jacob. As a non-Hebrew master, Laban could not claim the advantage of biblical law, though pagan practice might have worked as well in this case. Thus through this equivocal legal detail, wifely wiles, and divine intervention Jacob escapes, though not for long. While he is at last free in the land of Canaan, his descendants will not be so fortunate in the land of Ham.

When the Deuteronomist came to review, clean-up, and summarize Scripture centuries after the stories of Genesis and the laws of Exodus were first composed, the idolatrous polytheist allusion -- "And his master shall present him to the gods" -- simultaneously tolerated and derided in the first version, now had to be removed. What survived was a ritual of awl, ear, and door, shorn of its original theological-polemical context.

That door's low threshold between Jacob's freedom and servitude should not obscure what distinction biblical law attempted to create in theory between Hebrew and Gentile slave. The Solomonic slave tax that defines the status of the Canaanite peoples in the Book of Kings concludes with the explicit exclusion of the Israelites from the ranks of slavery; instead they are men of war, leading chariots and cavalry, commanders and adjutants (I Kings 9:15-22). While Gentile slaves can be bought as permanent property, the Hebrew's slavery is supposed to be temporary and humane. Harshness is proscribed for the Hebrew, but by implication prescribed for the Gentile (Leviticus 25:43-46). Challenging such ethnocentricity was the moral rationalization for slavery that recognized how flaws of character could reduce even the Israelite to Canaanite status. Justifying such ethnocentricity was the over-riding notion that Israel already had an Eternal Master who had obtained their service as the price of freeing the people of Jacob from bondage to Ham. Slavery in Egypt is part of the enslavement of Canaan.

The Hebrew Slave in Egypt

Just as Isaac's accursed blessing of Jacob anticipated his quasi-slavery under Laban in Mesopotamia so does that ordeal anticipate the enslavement and escape of Israel in the other river empire of the ancient Near East, the kingdom of the Nile. The Bible's narrative unfolds in recurring patterns. After escaping his father-in-law's justice, Jacob returned to establish brood and flocks in the land of his fathers' sojournings, Canaan. Nonetheless justice is to be visited upon Jacob through an elaborate plot that imposed upon his son Joseph and eventually all the Children of Israel the bondage that he had eluded. How this son came to be enslaved both repeats and departs, most revealingly of all, from what happened to Ham and Canaan.

Joseph, late born of Jacob's favorite wife Rachel, was his favored son as well (Genesis 37-47). Joseph dreamed that his brothers, all older than he, and his father and mother as well would come to acknowledge his mastery and then blurted out this prophecy to all. Like Ham before him, Joseph could not be discreet. Even more than Ham, Joseph sought to "become foremost among his brothers and colleagues". As with Ham and Canaan, slavery was the proper punishment for such arrogant lust for power. When the brothers sought to avenge themselves on their little brother, though their initial preference was cold-blooded murder, they settled for selling him to a caravan bound for Egypt. Like Canaan's, Joseph's bondage rescued him from death.

Once in Egypt, the house of Ham, Joseph's fate starts to differ from Canaan's or does it? His new slave master was Potiphar, a *saris* of Pharaoh. That word can mean many things in Hebrew, "a chamberlain", "an officer", but also "a eunuch", not surprising since castration was often a job requirement for ranking positions in oriental courts. For the young Joseph to become the slave of a eunuch suggests some kind of sexual exploitation or violence, like that inflicted perhaps on Ham's father and master, Noah himself. The narrator skillfully reinforced

that hint of impending sexual danger by abruptly abandoning Joseph in his eunuch-master's hands and shifting the focus to an apparently unrelated story of Joseph's older brother Judah. In fact each element of this new tale, filled with sexual misconduct, death, lust, and longing, heightens the expectation that a similar sexual fate awaits the little brother.

Alarmingly this new chapter begins with Judah taking a Canaanite to wife, the sexual failing that the patriarchs had avoided, but to which this next generation succumbed. Three sons she bore him. Judah married the first off to a young woman named Tamar, but he died without issue. Father Judah then told his second son to do his duty and preserve the family's line, but he preferred to scatter his issue to the ground. For this sin of Onanism, God punished Onan with death. Now Tamar was alone, unsatisfied, childless, and unmarried, a black widow bundled back to her father's house, tied by custom to the family of Judah, but abandoned by them. To avoid this fate she played the whore and seduced her unwitting lustful father-in-law into quenching the heat of her loins and filling her womb with twins, security for her old age. Like his own father blinded by lust, he did not even recognize the daughter-in-law he was bedding. Remember as well that Israelite incest and sexual incontinence afflicted another of Joseph's brothers in a way that recalled the original sin that led to slavery in the first place. Joseph's eldest brother, Reuben, had spied his father's concubine and lay with her.

Would Joseph repeat or reject such randy ways? Potiphar had a wife. This unfortunate wife of a eunuch was unsatisfied and alone, like Tamar. Like Tamar, she too tried to seduce someone from the line of Jacob, but Joseph, unlike Judah, spurned her. Confounding expectations, his rejection of her advances confirmed how unjustly enslaved he was. In contrast to the uxorious Hebrew slave, in contrast to his brothers and his father, and in contrast to the lack of sexual self-control that was the mark of slavishness in general, Joseph's mastery

of his nature confirmed the truth of his dream. It also confirms the core argument that sexual indiscipline leads to slavery, while sexual discipline leads to mastery.

Joseph's discipline immediately made him the master of the prison to which he was first confined by the wife's false accusation of sexual assault. It gave weight to his protests of innocence. He had not been enslaved, but rather "stolen away", not from the land of Canaan, a word redolent of just enslavement, but rather from the land of the Hebrews (Genesis 40:15), the first and only time in Scripture that territory is so named. His self-mastery ultimately gained him the mastery over all of Egypt as viceroy to Pharaoh. Not only was he unjustly enslaved, he -- in striking contrast to Ham -- had now proven himself to be a just master, far from the enthralled master in the Hegelian Ham-Canaan relationship. The lack of self-control demonstrated by Jacob and two of his sons as well seems to justify the eventual enslavement of the children of Israel to that Pharaoh's successors. When at father Jacob's behest his sons first left their homeland to buy the corn that Joseph's masterful prudence had stored in Egypt, they announced that they -- in contrast to Joseph -- came from the land of Canaan (42:7), an acknowledgement of their native knavishness. And when they came again for food, they feared that they would be made slaves to this master of Egypt (43:18). And still later when Jacob blessed his sons after the family had settled in the land of Goshen, he accepted that at least one, Issachar, would be a beast of burden, a slave set to the task (49:14-15). Remarkably Jacob's blessing of this slave-like son incorporates words and allusions that punningly recall both the sons' encounter with Noah in his tent and the Canaanite rape of Dinah.⁴⁶ What Jacob

⁴⁶ I thank Calum Carmichael for calling this to my attention. The Hebrew words are *hamor* ("ass") and *shechem* ("shoulder"). The latter appears in both Genesis 34 and 10, while the former appears literally in Genesis 34 and as a pun on *Ham/Hamor* in Genesis 10. Shechem the son of Hamor, you may recall, was Dina's rapist. The incident itself was cited by the Rabbis to gloss Ham's act as rape of his father. In 1575 a Dominican in Lima butchered this verse on the enslavement of Issachar to argue that the color and enslavement of blacks was due to the sins of their fathers, see below, p. 52.

did not predict was that all of his children, not just this one son, would soon be beasts of burden.

Despite anticipating and justifying the bondage of Israel to Egypt on grounds redolent of biblical slavery according to Genesis, Exodus ultimately decided to make this a new form of enslavement. Abruptly shorn of moralizing attacks against sexual license and idolatry, Egypt's slaving of the children of Jacob guarded against a multiplying minority who might ally with a foreign invader (Exodus 13:8)). The Bible significantly chose later not to invoke this same *realpolitik* for the Canaanites dwelling in Israel's own realm. The Genesis authors had introduced the classic concomitant, sex, in the stories of Jacob, Joseph, and Judah, but at this crucial moment in the creation of Israel's sacred history, Exodus cast it aside in order to make clear how invalid and unnatural was this new unprecedented act of bondage. Joseph should have made the difference. As the narrator explains just before the Israelites are enslaved, "A new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph" (1:8). Not only did he not know all that Joseph had done to benefit Egypt, he also did not know that Joseph's exceptional sexual self-mastery should have inoculated all of the Israelites against their fate.

Eventually at God's command Moses leads his people and undertakes plague-filled bargaining to gain their exit from this house of bondage. But what are they to achieve and where are they to go? The later retelling of the Passover tale, the Haggadah, offers freedom from bondage, but that is not exactly what Scripture here specifies. What changes is not their status, but their master. In Egypt they served Pharaoh. After Egypt they served the Lord. For both, they were slaves. In the book of Exodus, six times the Lord instructed Moses to tell Pharaoh, not "to let My people go", as folk-song and modern translations would have it, implying the release to freedom, but "to send My people" (Exodus 7:16), a literal reading preserved in the early Greek, Aramaic, and Latin. To what effect? So that they may, literally,

slave for the Lord in the wilderness, according to the first, fullest, and most literal version of the Lord's briefing paper for Moses (Exodus 7:16). God then brought them out of the house of slaves, without a commitment to bring them to the house of freedmen (13:3-4). He brought them out as a slave-master might with an outstretched commanding arm, with the confidence of legal judgment (6:6), and with the strength of hand (13:3).

Biblical Slavery in Sum

Recognizing the intertwining of real with metaphoric slavery in the Bible does not explain away the existence of a system of domination and exploitation. Ever since the conflicted acceptance and horror over the meaning of the obscure prophecy of Lamech at the birth of his son, Noah-- which I argue predicts Noah's invention of slavery⁴⁷ -- the cruel nature of the system, master versus slave, us versus them, has been uneasily acknowledged. But the Bible does, perhaps, diminish the crudity of that dichotomy by recognizing its complexity and contradiction. The hard and fast divisions can become porous, for worse or for better. Death may become slavery. Slavery as morally justified collective or individual punishment may become slavery as a cruel accident of fate, selfish exploitation or political oppression. The permanence of Gentile slavery may be overturned by a just revolt, a promise held out to Esau though never realized within the Bible. The sexual undiscipline of the Hebrew slave may reduce him to the status of permanent Gentile slave. The powerfully seductive irony is that through this focus on slave sexuality the master who sexually exploits his chattel blames the slave for her/his master's vice. Projection has no shame and no limits.

The Curse of Esau in the Patristic Tradition

⁴⁷ Genesis 5:29. The argument is developed in Part Two, "The Enslavement of Canaan" in my *Sex, Slavery, and Racism...*

Between the compilation of the Jewish Scriptures as we now know them and the rise of Christianity, Jews continued to write and collect words that aspired to a sacred character. Until the closing of the Jewish Canon around the second century however, this so-called Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, possessed considerable Scriptural authority for both communities and for many Christians still does. This literature both reinforced and modified what the Pentateuch and the later books of the Canon taught. For our purposes the most important of these extra-biblical works was the Book of Jubilees, written in Palestine in the mid-second century bce. Jubilees tidied up Genesis and Exodus insuring that the Patriarchs and their colleagues behaved themselves in accordance with a second century understanding of Jewish mores, law, and political needs, slavery included. The author, in all likelihood a priest at the Temple in Jerusalem, had a clear agenda.⁴⁸ Above all he valued the rigid observance of the law in a wide range of domains including calendrical precision -- hence the name Jubilees, a reference to the Jubilee year, an event punctiliously noted throughout the book -- and sexual morality, a recurring trope. Jubilees also modified biblical slavery. No hint of the later Scriptural allusions to Canaanite slave labor from Joshua, Judges, and Kings, for example, disturbed the text. Jubilees omitted in its retelling even vague statements that the Rabbis later transformed into evidence of Canaanite enslavement in the Pentateuch. Apart from Noah's initial cursing of Canaan with enslavement, death and destruction, not bondage, is repeatedly the fate of his descendants (Jubilees, 20:4-5, 22:20-21). On the other hand, a figure who is relatively minor in the Bible's Genesis narrative of enslavement and largely undeveloped as its symbol in the later books of the Hebrew Bible as well as in rabbinic literature, assumes much more significance in Jubilees' retelling. That figure is Esau, the nearly blessed but ultimately

⁴⁸ James C. VanderKam, "The Origins and Purposes of the Book of Jubilees," in *Studies in the Book of Jubilees*, ed., Matthias Albani, Jörg Frey, Armin Lange, Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1997, 3-24.

accursed brother of Jacob. Why Esau and not Canaan came to embody slavery in Jubilees demonstrates how long-standing the manipulation of the biblical narrative for evanescent political, social, or economic purposes has been. It also reveals a profound awareness of and discomfort at the slavishly sexual portrayal of Jacob that Genesis itself offered. Jacob gets a makeover.

Randy Jacob became the paragon of priestly prudery. In Genesis Jacob rushes madly for Rachel in Mesopotamia and blindly deflowers her bedtrick substitute, Leah, on the wedding night. In Jubilees while still in the land of Canaan before he has ever laid eyes on the sisters, he dutifully announced to his mother, Rebecca,

I heard some time ago that daughters had been born to your brother, Laban. And I have set my heart upon them that I might take a wife from among them. And therefore I have guarded myself in my soul lest I sin or be corrupted in any of my ways all the days of my life because my father, [meaning grandfather,] Abraham, gave me many commands regarding lust and fornication. (Jubilees 25:6-7) O.S. Wintermute, tr. in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1985, 2:105.

As if this bit of unctuous goodygoodliness is not enough, he then tattled on his brother Esau, who for twenty-two years had been trying to get Jacob to take one of his Canaanite sisters-in-law to wife. But the good son reassured mother Rebecca, "I will not take for myself as a wife from the daughters of the seed of Canaan, and I will not act wickedly as my brother has done" (Jubilees 25:9). Fast forward, once in Mesopotamia his behavior was equally decorous: No impulsive kissing and impetuous demands for sexual fulfillment. Genesis Jacob did not realize until the next morning that he had slept with Leah. Jubilees Jacob knew it right away and accepted Laban's explanation of local custom (Jubilees 28:4). Genesis Jacob dreamt of copulating goats and with his rods manipulated the imagination of ewes in heat. Jubilees Jacob took no steps to achieve the properly marked sheep. God presumably did the trick by Himself. Most significantly of all Rachel never had to steal the *terafim* since Jacob had never

revealed a slavish nature and thus was not in danger of becoming a slave. Esau by contrast comes out much worse, panderer and seducer. Isaac has no sympathy for him. He gets enslaved to his brother, does retain the right of revolt, but unlike the Genesis tale that holds out ultimate freedom, this revolt is simply a prelude to his ultimate destruction (Jubilees 26:31-35).

In Jerusalem, second century bce, a priestly patriot would have special incentive to suppress any suggestion that Esau should revolt against Jacob. The hostility between Judea and its eastern neighbor, Idumea, regarded as the heir of Esau (in the Bible, aka Edom), had been heating up and continued to simmer over the following two centuries until Rome conquered the entire region and brought it under direct rule. Canaan, on the other hand, the rival of the children of Israel for the ancient Holy Land and the prior object of enslavement had effectively disappeared. Accordingly consistent with the needs of the age, not only did the author remove hints of Jacob's slavish character; he also reinforced the prophecies that Esau was the one to be enslaved. Thus does the ephemeral happenstance of political convenience determine the meaning of Scripture. The result was that distinctively in Jubilees, of all the extant scriptural and para-scriptural Jewish writings, does Esau assume the role of archetypal slave, that Scripture itself and most later authorities ascribe to Canaan. Never missing a chance, Jubilees does tie Esau closer to the Canaanite evil than does Genesis itself so that the classic trope of sexual sin is present as well, but Jubilees Canaan does not assume the level of slavishness that Esau acquires. The appearance of Esau -- rather than Ham or Canaan -- as an archetypal slave in the writings of Philo, Paul, Ambrose, and Augustine meant that the mark of Jubilees was upon them. Paradoxically, to close readers, such as Philo and his colleagues, Jubilees' suppression of Jacob's sexually slavish character had the effect of calling attention to its presence in the original Genesis story. Joined to the other scriptural evidence that linked

hypersexuality to slavery, all these writers had the proof that certain unmanageable behavior could make one a slave.

Although Philo -- particularly when reflecting his Hellenistic Stoic heritage -- seemed to oppose the doctrine of the natural slave, influenced by Jubilees and the biblical tradition in general when dealing with Esau, he embraced it.⁴⁹ The innately vice-laden character of Esau and his partner Ham, along with Ham's other sons, Canaan and Egypt, define their nature, in accordance with Leviticus 18, body as opposed to soul, passion as opposed to reason, in all cases clearly linked to servility. It is a principle that Philo delicately repeated to draw the same conclusion:

... some of those [slaves] thus bought and sold reverse the situation to such an extreme extent that they become the masters of their purchasers instead of their slaves. I have often seen pretty little slave girls with a natural gift for wheedling words, who with these two sources of strength, beauty of face and charm of speech, storm the hearts of their owners. For these two are engines of attack against souls with no ballast or stability, engines mightier than all the machines constructed to demolish walls. This is shown by the way in which their owners court them supplicate them, eagerly beg their favours, as though they were praying to fortune or some good genius. If they are scouted they go into fits of despair and if they just see a kindly glance they dance for joy.⁵⁰

Even to the point of projecting onto the slave a cunning hypersexuality that is the master's own obsession, Philo's words echo the biblical notions of what makes a slave by nature, a slave.

Within a century or so of Philo's words, the rabbis of the Mishnah echoed the same sentiment in a work of ethical teaching no less, "the more bondwomen, the more lewdness".⁵¹ The sexual dominance that the master exercises over the slave, the master's vice, is transferred onto the slave.

⁴⁹ See multiple the statements from Philo on Esau in Garnsey, 164-71. To be precise, Garnsey mentions the Bible and not Jubilees.

⁵⁰ Philo, *Every Good Man is Free*, sections 38-40.

⁵¹ *Mishnah, Pirke Aboth*, 2.7.

For early Christians Esau had advantages over Ham/Canaan as the icon of slavery. It avoided the troubling exegetical questions, both why Canaan gets cursed for what Ham did and what was done to Noah. Though Paul addresses the matter only briefly, he too repeats Jubilees' greater interest in the enslavement of Esau rather than of Ham, with the same accompanying baggage of slavery linked to sin.⁵² About three centuries later the powerful bishop of Milan, Ambrose, integrated Jubilees' emphasis on Esau, Philo's ideas about slavery, along with the scattered appearances of the problem in Paul's epistles, creating a Christian notion of the natural slave that Augustine expanded into a well-developed "theory of the origins of slavery on the basis of a doctrine of sin."⁵³ At this point the original biblical argument securely enters the authoritative Latin Christian tradition.⁵⁴

⁵² Romans 9:12-13 and 6:17-23 discussed in Garnsey, 174-184.

⁵³ Garnsey, 204-5.

⁵⁴ The doctrine popularized by some nineteenth century abolitionists that the while the Old Testament is mired in slavery, the New Testament is resolutely abolitionist (Shlomith Yahalom, "Jews and Slavery in the American Civil War in Light of the Theological Debate over the Holy Scriptures" (in Hebrew), *Zion*, 65 (2000), 163-203.) is dispelled by Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*.

Slavery and Sin

Neither Jubilees nor the First Testament has a doctrine of original sin, but both clearly had a doctrine of sexual sin linked to slavery. The sin that led directly to slavery did not occur until ten generations after the expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Despite this chronological gap the doctrine of original sin and its connection to slavery did follow. As Augustine asserted in the *City of God*, "The prime cause of slavery is sin, so that man was put under man in a state of bondage; and this can be only by a judgement of God..."⁵⁵ One might call this the divine right of bondage. And this divine right is given by Scripture and Jubilees a history traced directly to the household of Noah, its founder, imposed by sin on Canaan, linked by marriage and descent to Esau whose wives came from Canaanite stock. For Augustine, Esau's enslavement reveals the sin that Christians believe all are party to, the original sin of Adam and Eve in Eden.⁵⁶ The notion of sexual sin ran through biblical enslavement, an understanding that could appeal powerfully to Augustine's psyche as well as his intellect.

Early medieval discussions of slavery drew mostly on the Roman legal tradition which emphasized its origins in war and the Augustinian tradition which grafted original sin onto the sexual sin of biblical servitudinism.⁵⁷ It was this tradition, rather than the long-lost Aristotelian argument about natural slavery, that carried the case. When in the late middle ages peasants attempted to challenge the bondage into which they had fallen, they sought their freedom in the natural state of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, before Fall and Flood.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Augustine *City of God*, 19.15.

⁵⁶ Augustine, *Epistulae*, 194.34, Garnsey tr., 215-6.

⁵⁷ Sir Robert Warrand Carlyle and A.J. Carlyle, *A History of Medieval Political Thought in the West*, Edinburgh, London, W. Blackwood, 1950, 1:113-124.

⁵⁸ Rodney Hilton, *Bond Men Made Free*, NY, 1973, 211-212. Thanks to Michael Toch for calling this to my attention.

Countering Scripture, not Aristotle, was their agenda. Further proof is to be found in Aquinas. If anyone in the entire sorry story of the Euro-American embrace of slavery should have fully and consciously integrated the Aristotelian notion of the natural slave into his philosophy it should have been Aquinas. After all, unlike almost everyone else before Albertus Magnus he had access to the works of Aristotle. But what we find when we closely examine Aquinas on this matter is confusion.⁵⁹ As the authorities on medieval political thought, the brothers Carlyle have written, "It is not easy to arrive at a confident judgment with regard to the whole of St. Thomas' position as regards slavery."⁶⁰ Ultimately they argue that Aquinas employed two different meanings of nature. In the state of nature, that is in the Garden of Eden before the Fall, there was no slavery. However outside the state of nature, in the post-lapsarian world of sin, some people did have natures of sin that inclined them to be enslaved. Aquinas could not ignore that for the purpose of slavery, the classic sin in Scripture was the lack of sexual self-control. Despite the discovery of Aristotle, the argument seems unchanged from Augustine and clearly has roots that can be traced back to the First Testament.

To be sure slavery did not get much focused attention until the age that linked exploration and exploitation to create the continents of America, Africa, Europe, and Asia, the world we now know and take for granted.⁶¹ Reflecting that age, the Sepulveda-de las Casas debate was probably the earliest and longest, the most sustained and explicit, engagement with the problem of slavery in Christian thought. In the full flush of Euro-Christendom's new-found obsession with Graeco-Roman thought, references to Aristotle abound. Unfortunately

⁵⁹ The key passages in the Summa are I-I, 96, 4; I-II, 94, 5; II-II, 57, 3-4; II-II 108, 4;; i. ii.

⁶⁰ Carlyle & Carlyle, 5:21-24.

⁶¹ See my "And That's How Continents Got Invented...." for panel on Revising the History of Space, the American Association of Geographers Meeting, Honolulu, 25-28 March 1999.

the scholarship that has addressed this period has mistaken words for substance.⁶² That substance in fact drew upon a biblical not a pagan tradition.

The biblical deep-rootedness of slavery explains the difficulty that the entire Western community -- as defined by an intellectually coherent as opposed to politically expedient (à la Huntington) recognition that it encompasses all the heirs of Scripture, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam -- has had in abandoning slavery. It is not some external pagan-justified accretion, but rather deeply embedded within the defining magisterial tradition. Medieval English and later early modern German peasants sought their freedom by casting their claims back to the prelapsarian world of an earthly paradise. Bolstered by sin, original and otherwise -- to whatever degree modified by Protestantism -- biblical servitudinism still had too many arrows in its quiver to fall to such attacks. Abolitionism had to wait for a different cultural moment. Only during the eighteenth century in the aftermath of Spinoza did it begin to be possible to develop an intellectual stance independent of the dominant biblical tradition. Then a sustained and largely successful attack on slavery could arise.⁶³ To be sure abolitionism drew upon the Bible to make its case, but such antislavery reading of what had always been a proslavery document could only begin when an intellectual space had developed outside the text and its traditional hermeneutic. The Quakers and their evangelical allies engaged in a form of hermeneutical jiu-jitsu, using the Bible against itself.

In the nineteenth century US, the influential Josiah Priest (1788-1852), a near contemporary in time and place of Joseph Smith, revived the stories of Ham's sexual

⁶² For example, Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982 and John Francis Maxwell, "... Catholic Doctrine Concerning Slavery", particularly 315-316.

⁶³ David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*, NY: OUP, 1988, 291-391.

immorality in widely read tracts that before the Civil War defended racial slavery and after the war promoted racial segregation, a key point of transition in our sorry history.⁶⁴ Priest, little more than a self-educated Presbyterian saddle-maker -- though some later reprints of his work erroneously added Reverend and M.A. to the title-page -- made use of a tradition, remarkably similar to the hermetic sources of Mormonism.⁶⁵ Unlike the texts of Latter-Day Saints, Priest's interpretation did in fact echo a genuinely biblical reading of sexuality and servitudinism. However in a departure from that tradition, Priest was the first in the history of iconography to portray Ham as a black man.⁶⁶ His work transmitted and transformed ancient Near Eastern exegesis into modern America thought, mixing a tradition of sexuality and servitudinism with that newly invigorated racism that flourished in the aftermath of the Jacksonian age. He deserves far more attention than he has received.⁶⁷

Priest's approach differs from what -- according to Eugene Genovese and others -- dominated the divisive debates over the Bible and slavery in the antebellum United States.

⁶⁴ Josiah Priest, *Slavery, as it relates to the Negro, or African race, examined in the light of circumstances, history and the Holy Scriptures; with an account of the origin of the black man's color, causes of his state of servitude and traces of his character as well in ancient as in modern times: with strictures on abolitionism*. Albany, Printed by C. Van Benthuysen, 1843, 76-77, 150-167. It was continuously in print with various titles from its first edition until the 1870s, in nearly a dozen editions. According to WorldCat copies are now to be found in most of the major antebellum Southern libraries and seminaries. His obsession with Ham first appeared in his earlier, *American Antiquities and Discoveries in the West: Exhibition... that an Ancient Population of Partially Civilized Nations Differing Entirely from Those of the Present Indians Peopled America, Many Centuries before... Columbus...*, Albany, Third Edition, 1833, 14-31. This was almost as successful as his later work, reaching some seven editions. Stephen Haynes, *Noah's Curse, The Biblical Justification of American Slavery*, NY: OUP, 2002, argues for the influence of Priest in defenses of slavery.

⁶⁵ The erroneous title page has misled at least one historian, Larry Tise, *Proslavery, A History of the Defense of Slavery in American, 1701-1840*, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987, 365. Though Priest himself was self-educated, his sons became, respectively, Presbyterian pastor and medical doctor.

⁶⁶ See the discussion in my "Cham et Noé. Race, esclavage et exégèse entre Islam, Judaïsme, et Christianisme", *Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 57 (2002), no. 1, Jan-Feb, 93-125, summary, http://www.ehess.fr/editions/revues/Annales/Sommaires/ahss57_1_braude.html unedited English original, http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/research/rapl/word/braude01.doc

⁶⁷ The only study, Winthrop Hillyer Duncan, "Josiah Priest, Historian of the American Frontier, A Study and Bibliography", *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, New Series, 44(1934), 45-102, fails to highlight his racist thinking.

The evidence gathered by Steven Haynes suggests that Priest's lurid accounts of the Black Ham's sex crimes justified the fiercely- and widely-held Southern argument that Hamite dishonor demanded enslavement and degradation. Recent studies of the religious debates over slavery have focused on the clerical elite to the neglect of the popular religion that shaped the common culture in which the better educated wrote and were heard. According to Mark Noll, the dominant school of American common-sense literalism pressed the case for biblical slavery, confident that the Word would set no slave free.⁶⁸ According to Robert Forbes, enlightened evangelicals such as Francis Wayland depended upon exegetical ingenuity to argue the contrary.⁶⁹ The divide in self-avowed classless America between the self-taught and the formally trained was too porous to seal elite arguments from the influences all around them. Josiah Priest's own son was a respectable Presbyterian minister and his book was reprinted many times in the Scottish Presbyterian community of Glasgow, Kentucky. Unfortunately what the Bible and religion could be made to say about race and how that interacted with slavery has received still less attention. And I will argue below (see pp. 56-59) that what the elite knew and the degree to which it racialized their reading of the Bible was far more disturbing and complicated than what some historians have assumed.

Catholic teaching, more deeply, though to be sure differently, entrenched in the biblical servitudinal tradition, took even longer to abandon it. Even as late as the 1950s Catholic manuals of moral teaching regularly accepted slavery as legitimate albeit conditioned

⁶⁸ Mark A. Noll, "The Bible and Slavery", Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Stout, Charles Reagan Wilson, ed., *Religion and the American Civil War*, NY: OUP, 1998, 43-73. Mark Noll's magisterial *America's God, From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln*, NY:OUP, 2002, 386-422 sets his earlier argument in a larger context.

⁶⁹ Robert P. Forbes, "Slavery and the Evangelical Enlightenment", John McKivigan and Mitchell Snay, ed., *Religion and the Antebellum Debate over Slavery*, Athens: U. of Georgia Press, 1998, 68-106, especially 85.

on a heavy dose of ameliorationism. The Catholic Church did not reject slavery as such until the Second Vatican Council labeled it "an infamy" (Gaudium & Spes 27), though in the 1890s Pope Leo XIII incorrectly claimed that it had.⁷⁰ Previously the Church condemned the slave trade or particularly flagrant aspects of slavery without attacking the institution as such. This dismal record puts the lie to the moral absolutism of natural law and the Church's pretense to embrace it. Similarly, those Jewish and Muslim spiritual-legal authorities rooted in their historically dominant mainstream traditions rarely have opposed slavery as a whole over the last two centuries.

III. ETHNICITY

While a stalwart pillar of servitudinism, the Bible is a weak reed for racism. The domestic interconnection of master and slave through family ties is a recurring topos in the Noah-Ham-Canaan complex that established the institution after the Flood. Nineteenth century arguments for slavery exploited the patriarchal and paternal themes of the Bible. Through racial Othering these arguments denied the foundation myths of family interconnectedness that should have blunted the development of racism. Polarized Black versus White identity, an essential building block for the racism of modern American society, was absent in the Bible's distant origins.⁷¹ Although skin color identity has been read into the Bible over nearly two thousand years, a careful re-reading, attuned to pre-Christian Near Eastern visual and verbal culture, reveals that this part of the ancient world, as opposed to Greece, was almost color-blind. Furthermore the ancient world had little

⁷⁰ John Francis Maxwell, *Slavery and the Catholic Church: The History of Catholic Teaching concerning the Moral Legitimacy of the Institution of Slavery*, Chichester and London: Barry Rose Publishers, in association with the Anti-Slavery Society for the Protection of Human Rights, 1975, 86-88, 117-118, 123, and his, "The Development of Catholic Doctrine Concerning Slavery", *World Justice* 11:2 (December 1969), 147-92, 11:3 (March 1970), pp. 291-324, and Paul Halsell, "Slavery" adapted on website: <http://www.geocities.com/pharsea/Slavery.htm#Introduction>

⁷¹ See my "Black Skin/White Skin in Ancient Greece and the Near East", *Micrologus*

adherence to the hereditarian determinism that so distinguishes racism from other forms of prejudice.⁷² Instead anti-hereditarian notions such as maternal impressionism and its corollary, cross-color generation, spread from the Near Eastern to the Greco-Roman worlds.⁷³ The procrustean concept of three sons=three continents, which helped confine Ham to Africa, is not only alien to the Bible, but also to the Euro-American tradition of geography that did not embrace continentalism until the early modern era.⁷⁴

Slavery as Nation-Building

Arguing that the Bible lacks concepts that foster racism does not mean that it lacks other means of constructing ethnicity. Within the narrative of both the First and the Second Testaments, religion and a covenantal relationship to God are the most abiding means of constructing identity and peoplehood. Slavery, intertwined as it is with religious devotion to God, plays an important role in this construction project. The relationship between the religious sin of unmastered sexuality, i.e. slavery, and ethnicity has been demonstrated in the construction of Hamite and Canaanite identity as well as in the transformation of the Hebrew indentured servant into a quasi-Canaanite slave. An entire category of biblical slaves became eligible for a status that made them superior to the common lay Israelite.⁷⁵ Through circumcision, the Gentile male slave became part of the

⁷² Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, 4.3.769b, reveals his inability to explain the transmission or non-transmission of traits from one generation to the next.

⁷³ My paper, "Race and Sex: What Happened to Cross-Color Generation in the Eighteenth Century?" Conference on Sexuality in Early America, McNeil Center for Early American Studies, University of Pennsylvania, Omohundro Institute for Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia, Philadelphia, June 1-3 2001

⁷⁴ My paper, "And That's How Continents Got Invented..." expands the argument briefly presented in my "The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods", *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, vol. 54, January 1997, 109.

community of Israel. Slavery as ethnogenesis and as a way station for ethnic transformation and assimilation occurs in many other contexts. For example the Ottoman devshirme system staffed much of the army and administration, integrating and assimilating the ablest of subjects through a system of state slavery.⁷⁶

Most remarkably of all Israel itself was created through slavery -- "They went down to Egypt, small in number, and there they became a great people, magnificent and many," (Deuteronomy, 26:5) a line from Exodus that gets repeated in the ritual retelling of the Passover story, the Haggadah.⁷⁷ Their first slave master was pharaoh, their last God, a relationship that defined them as a people. The Exodus account of slave-nation-building has been both a heuristic model and an inspiration for the Afro-American experience. First, the biblical account does recognize the social reality that enslavement creates ethnic identity, both for the oppressed and the oppressor. Second, it in turn inspired the slave communities of the Old South, through Israel in Egypt and in the wilderness on the way to the Promised Land, as they forged a new identity for themselves.⁷⁸

During the early rabbinic period when Christianity was beginning to emerge, slavery-based ethnogenesis recurred. In the Mishnah, a law code compiled in the second century ce, the rabbis constructed the distinction between Jewish and non-Jewish slave status by contrasting Hebrew

⁷⁵ A slave owned by a priestly household could partake of a sacrifice forbidden a lay Israelite (Leviticus 22:11). Unclear from this passage is the identity of the slave, Gentile or Israelite, but I believe the slave is in fact Gentile. Biblical practice on this point differs from ancient Greece.

⁷⁶ I. Metin Kunt, "Transformation of *Zimmi* to *Askeri*", in Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis, ed., *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire, the Functioning of a Plural Society*, New York, 1982, vol I: *The Central Lands*, 55-68.

⁷⁷ See my "The Nexus of Diaspora, Enlightenment, and Nation: Thoughts on Comparative History", in Richard Hovanissian and David Myers, ed. *Enlightenment and Diaspora, the Armenian and Jewish Cases*, Atlanta, Georgia, Scholars Press, 1999, pp. 5-44.

⁷⁸ Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., *Exodus!, Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth Century Black America*, Chicago, 2000.

and Canaanite slaves. They did so even though they realized that over the previous millennium the conquests and dispersions of history had rendered practically meaningless such ethnic categorization drawn from the Bible.⁷⁹ However they did construct a sub-caste drawing upon that very category, the Netinim, who were reputedly descendant from one of the Canaanite tribes, the Gibeonites, the Bible's legendary "hewers of wood and carriers of water". They had served Israel for generations and were counted among those who had returned from Babylon to found the Judean commonwealth under Cyrus in the sixth century bce. Their precise economic status in the world of these second century ce rabbis is unclear. They were not considered slaves, being superior in status to proselytes and freed slaves, but their distinctive caste status was somehow derived from an account of ancient slavish origins.⁸⁰ In the subsequent centuries, later rabbis developed the categories of Hebrew/Canaanite in their legal and homiletic interpretation. By then, building upon the Mishnaic awareness of historical change, the Canaanite had become a legal fiction, devoid of specific ethnic or racial identity, other than the broad category of non-Jew.

Hellenistic Transformations

Beginning with the Mishnah and subsequent rabbinic sources, Hellenized notions of color identity, absent from the Bible, started to appear. Conquest creates culture. The triumph of Hellenism in the Near East created a culture of color, in early Christian and Jewish sources. Kush became Aithiopia defined by the color of skin. I purposely avoid the modern spelling of the region since the two have little to do with each other. The other figures of the family of Ham were much more ambiguously defined, though Kush and the mysterious Put escaped the perfidy assigned the father and the other sons, Canaan and Egypt. While Kush was physically dark, Ham

⁷⁹ *Mishnah, Yadaim* 4.4.

⁸⁰ *Mishnah, Kiddushim* 4.1, *Mishnah, Horayot* 3.8, drawing upon Deuteronomy 29:10 MT/ 11V and Joshua 9: 21, 23, 27.

and his ilk suffered from spiritual and metaphorical darkness that could open a route to racism. The enslavement ascribed to the Hamites was focused on Canaan, whose color, unlike Kush's, merited no mention.

As Christianity and Islam sought to transform the ancient stories of the Jews into foundations for their own religions, they engaged in a massive rewrite. Christianity forced Jewish writ to commit textual bigamy treating the Israelite treasure as its own. They took over revered writings, but denied their plain sense. Israel was no longer Israel, but New Israel, the Church. Places and peoples were transformed to suit the Christian message. Islam chose a more radical and straightforward solution. Rather than simply swallowing Jewish and Christian holy writ whole, Islam rewrote both as a universalized deracinated version of the word of God. Thus Christianity allegorized Shem, Ham, and Japhet. Islam cut them in the editing room.

The consequences of these changes for the careers of Noah's sons were complex, as they started to acquire a variety of new identities. Christianity, even more thoroughly Hellenized than Judaism, adopted a color valence that in a later cultural moment could lend itself to racism, Origen's sermons on the Song of Songs being one influential example. In fact the earliest extant discussion that links the descendants of Ham, color, and slavery together -- albeit with ambiguity -- was a Homily by Origen on Genesis.⁸¹ Curiously this passage, in contrast to the rabbinic discussions, has been neglected by historians of racism.

The typological interpretation of what Christians called the Old Testament introduced a surprising new aspect to the story. Literal readings that loosely placed Ham in parts of Africa, Asia, Asia Minor, or the islands of the Aegean or identified Japhet with the Tigris, Shem with the

⁸¹ See my "Cham et Noé. Race, esclavage, et exégèse entre islam, judaïsme, et christianisme", *Annales*, p. 114-115.

Euphrates, and Ham with the Nile did exist in ancient and medieval Christian understanding,⁸² but they never inspired the same attention and respect as did the more highly valued allegory which made all the heroes and villains of the Old Testament anticipatory bit players in the life and passion of Christ. As Augustine was the first to note and as many who followed agreed, Noah was Christ and Ham who mocked him was the Jew.⁸³ Indeed the Jews were cursed with slavery, as a thirteenth century Mallorcan disputation states.⁸⁴ From the thirteenth through the sixteenth centuries, the Augustinian reading was diffused to an even greater public by a series of Tele-Bibles, the lavish *Bibles moralisées*, the omnipresent versions of the more modest *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*, and the widely translated *Biblia pauperum*.⁸⁵ Each of these well-illustrated books demonstrated how story from the First Testament received its proper moral conclusion in the Second. The archetypal images of Jew-hatred -- crooked nose, hunchback, pointed cap, bearded face and so forth -- were juxtaposed to or superimposed on Ham to create a potent linkage between the two in the popular imagination, literate and illiterate.⁸⁶ The visual predominance of the allegorized Jewish Ham in Europe was one reason a Black Ham was not

⁸² In general see my, "Sons of Noah.." *W&MQ*, the foundational placements of Ham by Josephus in AfrAsia and by Alcuin in Africa are discussed on pp. 111-113. As for Asia Minor, the Aegean and the rivers, they appear in the fifth century Alexandrian Chronicle, and, for the last location, as a 13/14th century gloss to that text, Henri Leclercq, "Chronique Alexandrine", *Dictionnaire d'Archéologie chrétienne et de Liturgie*, ed. Fernand Cabrol and Henri Leclercq, Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1913, vol. 3, part 1, cols. 1547-154 and Adolf Bauer and Josef Strzygowski, ed., *Eine alexandrische Weltchronik*, Vienna, 1905, 93.

⁸³ Augustine, *The City of God*, Book 16:2. The identification of Noah with Christ can be dated to the second century, Justin Martyr, *The Dialogue with Trypho*, tr. & ed., A. Lukyn Williams, London: Society for the Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1930, chapter 19, 2, p. 39, chapter 138, 2, p. 283.

⁸⁴ On the curse of Jews as slaves, see the statement of the Genoese merchant, Inghetto Contardo, Ora Limor, ed. *Die Disputationen zu Ceuta (1179) und Mallorca (1286)*, in *MGH, Quellen zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters*, vol. 15 (Munich, 1994), p. 176.

⁸⁵ See my "Michelangelo and the Curse of Ham: From a Typology of Jew-Hatred to a Genealogy of Racism" and Sara Lipton, *Images of Intolerance, The Representation of Jews in the Bibles moralisées*, Berkeley, 1999.

⁸⁶ For a catalogue of such images in general see Ruth Mellinkoff, *Outcasts, Signs of Otherness in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages*, Berkeley, 1993, 2 vols. and for a demonstration of their pervasiveness see her *Antisemitic Hate Signs in Hebrew Illuminated Manuscripts from Medieval Germany*, Jerusalem, 1999 ???

depicted until the nineteenth century. The failure of the Jewish Ham to cross the Atlantic is one reason the Black Ham emerged first in America.

Muslim Readings

Classical Islam took a different approach.⁸⁷ Since none of Noah's sons appear in the Quran, the issue could never assume the same importance. In one sense, slavery in Islamic thought drew upon different proof texts. Nonetheless, at a remove and through other genres, Muslim writers absorbed, adapted, polemicized with and distanced themselves from Jewish and Christian stories. Later, that which originated through the interaction with other traditions gradually acquired a theological and literary logic distinctive and internal to Islam. One of the genres which propagated stories most hostile to Ham and his children were the tales of the prophets, moralizing accounts of the unsurpassed virtues of those who preceded Muhammad in receiving divine revelation. The message required the prophets to be perfect and those who opposed them, the essence of willful ignorance and sometimes evil. Ham stood no chance in that atmosphere. Unfortunately those who would crudely link the depiction of Ham with the ebb and flow of the African slave trade in the Islamic world forget the religious constraints and narrative requirements that dictated the terms of his appearance.⁸⁸

In Islam the story spawned a number of paradoxes. On the one hand within the entire corpus of Arabic, Persian, and Turkish literature i.e. the core of Islamic thought, that racist interpretation is probably both clearer and more abundant earlier than in Judaism and Christianity. On the other hand, a universalist critique of chromophobic racism appears more prominently and earlier in Islam than in the other two traditions. Racism inconsistently appears in texts of lesser

⁸⁷ See my "Cham et Noé. Race, esclavage et exégèse entre Islam, Judaïsme, et Christianisme", *Annales*.

⁸⁸ William McKee Evans, "From the Land of Canaan to the Land of Guinea: The Strange Odyssey of the 'Sons of Ham,'" *American Historical Review*, 85 (1980) 15-43.

religious prestige. Universalism consistently appears in texts of greater piety and authority. Thus Islam proffers both the poison and its antidote. Unfortunately Euro-American culture has embraced the former and ignored the latter.

The distinguished and prolific Muslim scholar Tabari (838/9-923), the compiler of an early comprehensive commentary on the Quran and the most extensive and earliest universal history demonstrates how this worked. He attributed racist versions of the story -- linking a curse, skin color, and permanent slavery -- to the Jews in a way that simultaneously affirmed and opposed it, while employing it as a polemic against the alleged ethnocentricity of this rival. From at least 1697, in Europe and America this very story has been cited as representative of Islam. But what is regularly cited in his name contradicts his messages within Muslim culture. Tabari suffers from multiple personalities. His universal history has survived in many different versions: the original comprehensive Arabic version, two different Persian abridgements, as well as various Arabic versions derived therefrom, and at least one Turkish translation, also based on the Persian. Each one of these has something different to say about Ham. The most racist statements appear in the comprehensive Arabic original, which being about ten times the abridgement includes every other statement as well. The nonracist or least offensive statements appear in the various abridgements and translations.

Depending on the precise variant, either Ham himself is innocent of any misdeed or both Ham and his brother Japhet were equal partners in seeing Noah's nakedness. In either case slavery is not the Hamite fate. Thus most versions of Tabari widely known to Muslims did not provide a justification for racial slavery. This is not to argue that such claims were absent in Islam, but rather to suggest that their authority was far from unanimous and they came to prominence centuries later. In terms of diffusion and readership, the original Arabic was the least available in the Muslim world. The nonracist versions were the most available. However according to the

conventional Euro-American wisdom, the exact opposite is true, so much so that in some instances the racist Tabari is the only authority cited. In addition to Tabari, the historian, there is also Tabari, the exegete, the compiler of the most authoritative commentary on the Quran, known simply as the *Tafsir*. The *Tafsir*, like the overwhelming majority of Tabari's histories, omits the racist interpretations that link curse, color, and slavery, and it includes a homily on the origin of humanity which directly contradicts them. Why is it that humanity is colored, white, black, and red? Because when God came to form Adam he brought together and combined white dust, black dust, and red dust from the different parts of the world. From that single ancestor diversity emerged. With no money to be made off this noble expression of universal humanity, the myth of racial unity was never able to challenge the foundation myth of racial degradation.

The Hermeneutics of Exploration, Expansion, and Exploitation

In the course of the fifteenth, sixteenth, and early seventeenth centuries, new ways of reading the Bible and understanding the world emerged. A newly strengthened simple common-sense literalism was gradually pushing allegory aside, with the assistance of the Protestant revolution and print capitalism. Ultimately this emergent hermeneutic was to dominate the United States with profound effect on the battle over slavery.⁸⁹ Almost in tandem, European expansion into new lands and seas created a need for reconceptualizing and redefining space through viewing old texts in new ways. As Europe itself was constructing more elaborate justifications for the accidents of dynastic alliance and war that formed early modern states, the Bible was ransacked as a convincing source for foundation myths and justifications for the assertion of dominance. Seeking proofs for a dazzling array of political, cultural, social, territorial and economic claims -- racial slavery being only one among many -- in these centuries Europeans gave more attention to

⁸⁹ Mark Noll's *America's God* makes this point crystal clear.

biblical myths of origin than at any other point in their history.⁹⁰ A mixture of increasingly available Muslim and Jewish stories, selectively chosen and interpreted, were applied -- Tabari included. The first European account to employ the curse as an explanation for the enslavement of the peoples from below the Sahara, the mid-fifteenth-century *Chronicle of the Discovery and Conquest of Guinea* by Gomes Eannes de Azurara, drew upon his contacts with Muslim slave owners.⁹¹ By 1561, Guillaume Postel, *Cosmographicae disciplinae compendium*, had access to both Muslim and Jewish sources in his recounting of Ham's origin.⁹² In 1578, George Best citing no specific authority, introduced the curse into England where it became the first widely available version in any language.⁹³ An addition to the work of the distinguished French Hebraist Bishop Gilbert Genebrard included it by 1600 (p. 38).⁹⁴ George Sandys implied he had learned about it from Muslim slavers in Egypt during his voyage in the early seventeenth century.⁹⁵ Purchas equivocally integrated the last two into the many editions of his paean to English exploration.⁹⁶ Although Best has long been recognized as pioneering, its highly significant context has been

⁹⁰ Giuliano Gliozzi, *Adamo e il nuovo mondo, la nascita dell'antropologia come ideologia coloniale: dalle genealogie bibliche alle teorie razziali (1500-1700)*, Florence, 1977 and Maurice Olender, Maurice Olender, "Europe, or How to Escape Babel," tr. Jordan Kellman, in *Proof and Persuasion in History*, ed. Anthony Grafton and Suzanne L. Marchand, *History and Theory*, theme issue 33 (Middletown, Conn., 1994), 5-26.

⁹¹ Azurara [aka Gomes Eannes de Zurara], *The Chronicle of the Discovery and Conquest of Guinea*, trans. and ed. Charles Raymond Beazley and Edgar Prestige, 2 vols. (New York, n. d. [1963]; orig. pub. 1896-1899), 1:54-55, and accompanying notes, 2:319; for the original Portuguese see Azurara, *Crónica dos feitos not veis que se passaram no conquista de Guin por mandado do Infante D. Henrique*, ed. Torquato de Sousa Soares, (Lisbon, 1978), 2:103-04

⁹² Guillaume Postel, *Cosmographicae disciplinae compendium*, Basle, 1561, 16-19

⁹³ George Best, *A True discourse of the late voyages of discoverie, for the finding of a passage to Cathaya, by the Northwest, vnder the conduct of Martin Frobisher generall* (London, 1578), 18, 19-20, 28-32

⁹⁴ The publication history of his *Chronographia* is complicated, but it seems that the earlier versions of his work lacked some of the racist elements that appear in the later.

⁹⁵ George Sandys, "Iourney begun 1610," cited in Samuel Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumous*, London, 1625-1626, bk. 6, capt. 8, sec. 3, 2:913.

⁹⁶ For a detailed analysis of Purchas' use of Sandys and related matters, see "Sons of Noah", *W&MQ*, 135-138.

ignored.⁹⁷ Surprisingly, it appeared in an account of Martin Frobisher's quest for the Northwest Passage. That in turn was excerpted and reprinted in the second installment of Richard Hakluyt's call for English expansion, *Principal Navigations*.⁹⁸ The motive behind Best's inclusion of the curse of Africans in a book about Arctic waters lies buried in the middle of a typically endless title page, ... *also, there are annexed certayne reasons, to proue all partes of the worlde habitable....* Hakluyt's own title for the excerpt reiterates it, "Experiences and reasons of the Sphere to prooue all parts of the worlde habitable, and thereby to confute the position of the fiue Zones." Best, Hakluyt, and Purchas too were committed to English expansion worldwide. They wished to dispel the frightening rumors that horrible consequences attended voyages to the north or the south. Would travelers return frozen? Would travelers "be burned as black as a cole, as the Indians or Black Moores?" The source of such fears was "the persuasions of certaine Philosophers", that is the ancient Greek anti-hereditarian claim that the "Sphere" was divided into "five Zones", only some of which can support human life.⁹⁹ According to the most extreme versions of climate theory, those who lived in the antipodes might be monsters, not humans, and, perhaps, those from other regions who stayed there might become them as well.¹⁰⁰ Before the advent of global explorations and schemes for transoceanic colonization, the concerns had been largely theoretical speculations, but now they were becoming real. After such a voyage what guarantee did the Englishman have that a return to England would also return him to normality, even if he wished to run the risk of temporary monstrosity? The urgent desire to refute the

⁹⁷ Winthrop Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550-1812*, Chapel Hill, 1968, 17, 40; Alden Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan, "Before *Othello*: Elizabethan Representations of Sub-Saharan Africans," *William & Mary Quarterly*, 3d Series, 54 (1997), 27

⁹⁸ (London, 1598-1600), vol. 3, 48-69

⁹⁹ Best (1578), 18, 19-20, 28-32.

¹⁰⁰ In general, see Valerie I.J. Flint, "Monsters and the Antipodes in the Early Middle Ages and Enlightenment", *Viator, Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 15(1984), 65-80.

Philosophers in order to set the stage for English expansion demanded not only that Best disprove the climate explanation for human diversity, but also provide a convincing alternative. The curse of Ham was constructed in the sixteenth century to provide it. A biblical screed, however problematic its original meaning, might displace protean climate as the cause for color.

This attack on ancient climate theory coupled with the advocacy of the supposedly biblical source of fixed identity and status, were by no means unique to the English-speaking world. A colonial planter voiced it in Brazil.¹⁰¹ In 1575, just three years before George Best published his *... certayne reasons, to proue all partes of the worlde habitable...*, a Dominican, Francisco de la Cruz recounted to the inquisitorial court in Lima an angelic revelation. Speaking through the mouth of a colleague, the angel insisted that "los negros son justamente captivos por justa sentencia de Dios por los pecados de sus padres" ("the blacks are properly enslaved for the sins of their fathers, with the just sentence of God"). Their color comes from God, not from what "Philosophos" claim -- Best's favorite boogey-man as well. They are of the Israelite tribe of Asher, whom the Patriarch Jacob blessed as a strong ass, i.e. deprived of liberty and destined for hard labor, a beast of burden for his brethren. So eager were the European slave-holding colonists to displace ancient anti-hereditarianism with a supposedly ancient and even more authoritative alternative, affirming the fixity of identity, whatever its details, that even an angel was made to misquote Scripture. One reason why the curse of Asher has never rivaled its twin, the curse of

¹⁰¹ Ambrósio Fernandes Brandão, (? b. ca. 1555), *Diálogos das grandezas do Brasil (Dialogues of the great things of Brazil)*, tr. and ed., Frederick Holden Hall, William F. Harrison, and Dorothy Winters Welker, Albuquerque, 1987, 85-130, presents a nuanced attempt to reconcile the philosophical tradition on climate, the identity of Noah's offspring, and his own experiences in tropical climes.

Ham, or even its lesser rival, the curse of Esau, is that Francisco confused one of Jacob's sons with another. Far from slave, Asher was supposed to live well on lavish dainties.¹⁰²

Although the exploitation of slavery was an impetus for a curse, no matter who the fall guy, it was not by itself the initial prime mover for racism, which may be defined as the belief in fixed and unchanging, inherited, all-determining categories of human identity. The historiography of race has at times focused on monocausal explanations, inadequately defined and explored. The Atlantic plantation economy of exploitation, which has heretofore dominated the debate about its origins, was rooted in the cultural, political, and social institutions of exploration and colonial expansion. Thus to a subtle degree the first usage of Ham in the sixteenth century focused more on color than on slavery since settling these new lands was a first step in uttering this curse. Those historians arguing against the slave-construction of race and racism have drawn upon the literature of early colonial expansion, assuming that it reflects a pristine world view largely untainted by the distortions of slavery. They fail to recognize that it too was tainted, but by something else, historically closely related to the rise of Atlantic slave colonies, the initial establishment of the European colonies themselves. The literature of exploration and expansion departed from medieval and ancient norms to reassure all who left their homeland that they would not also lose their identity. The need to fix identity as profoundly rooted, essential, inherited and unchanging was necessary for the colonial enterprise to succeed.

In order to fight the disturbing uncertainties of ancient anti-hereditarianism, this need constructed one new biblical theme, the curse of Ham, and destroyed another much hoarier one, Jacob's rods. According to the Bible, speckled rods had been placed in front of ewes in heat so that they would give birth to the colored flock that was to be Jacob's pay (Genesis 30:31-43).

¹⁰² Marcel Bataillon, "Le 'Clérigo Casas', ci-devant colon, réformateur de la colonisation", *Bulletin Hispanique*, 54(1952), 276-369, particularly, 368. On Asher, compare Genesis 49:14-15 to verse 20.

Ever since many respected authorities believed that an image placed in view of either human parent at the moment of conception or the mother through parturition could so impress the resulting fetus that it affected post-partum appearance. Classically this meant that, without benefit of adultery, black parents could have a white child as well as vice versa, a profound attack on the fixity and purity of race if ever there was one. While widely diffused in the Greco-Roman world and in rabbinic and patristic literature and later accepted in medieval culture, by the early modern period the idea began to arouse skepticism. Nowhere was this skepticism greater than in the New World. By the late eighteenth century the belief was abandoned almost everywhere.¹⁰³

The ubiquity of the campaign against anti-hereditarianism, voiced separately in all the major sixteenth century colonial empires, suggests its importance in shaping the world view of the new colonialists. The implications of this argument, if correct, for the nature of European societies in the New World are disturbing, for they suggest that the very terms under which they were first established promoted racism. And this is without invoking George Fredrickson's argument that the subsequent rise of democracy and social and political egalitarianism contributed to the development of this new category for creating invidious categories of inferiority, race.¹⁰⁴ In that regard, my argument does suggest that whatever racism in the Old World and the New shared in common, there were some profound differences from the beginning.

However though significant and innovative, the colonial arguments of Azurara, Postel, the continuator of Genebrard, even Best, and Sandys were initially obscure and largely limited in circulation to a select audience and they were challenged. Azurara's curse were lost for centuries until first published in 1841. However Portuguese prejudice may have reached Best another way.

¹⁰³ See my paper, "Race and Sex: What Happened to Cross-Color Generation in the Eighteenth Century?"

¹⁰⁴ Developed in George M. Fredrickson, *Racism, A Short History*, Princeton, 2002.

Frobisher whose voyage he chronicled had been captured by the Portuguese in Africa.¹⁰⁵ The prophetic words and bizarre actions of Postel so disturbed his contemporaries that he ended his days in an asylum. His colleague, Jean Bodin, more respected and influential among his contemporaries, a few years later systematically reaffirmed the Philosophers and dismissed the opinion of "a certain learned man", doubtless Postel, that the curse of "Chus" had made men black.¹⁰⁶ The angel who spoke to Francisco de la Cruz was not heard again until the twentieth century. While Hakluyt and Purchas did bring the curse to a greater readership, Purchas, at least, did so skeptically. And much of that readership was self-selected for its openness to the colonial expansion that they preached. By contrast, in the mid-seventeenth century the distinguished physician and successful author, Thomas Browne, vigorously disabused his readers of a host of baseless theories including the curse of Ham in a collection of essays that achieved a far greater readership throughout Euro-America than all these other works combined.¹⁰⁷

Thus it was not until the eighteenth century, the height of the slave trade, that the curse of Ham came to gain broad acceptance. The proof text was Tabari, *à la occidentale*. The vehicle for this transformation was the most widely used biblical reference work of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, *Dictionnaire historique critique, chronologique, géographique et littéral de*

¹⁰⁵ Gary Taylor, *Buying Whiteness: Race, Skin, and Slavery from the European Renaissance to the Beginning of African American Literature*, forthcoming, addresses this, citing *Meta Incognita: A Discourse of Discovery: Martin Frobisher's Arctic Expeditions, 1576-1578*, ed. Thomas Symons, 2 vols. (Hull, Quebec: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1999).

¹⁰⁶ Jean Bodin, *Method for the Easy Comprehension of History*, tr. Beatrice Reynolds, New York: Columbia UP, 1945, 87. In contrast to Samuel Purchas discussion of this issue that was constantly changing from printing to printing (see my "Sons of Noah", *W&MQ*, 135-138) Bodin's opinions were steadfastly maintained, compare *Methodus, ad facilem historiarum cognitionem*, Paris, 1566, 82, to Paris, 1572, Basle, 1579, and Amsterdam 1650.

¹⁰⁷ *The Works of Sir Thomas Browne, Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (Chicago, 1964), 2: 469, extant in at least nineteen early editions in English, Dutch, German, French, and Italian, see Geoffrey Keynes, *A Bibliography of Sir Thomas Browne* (Cambridge, 1924), particularly, 48-65. Browne's arguments survived into the eighteenth century, see *The British Apollo*, second edition (1711), 2. His *Pseudodoxia Epidemica or Enquiries into Very Many Tenents and Commonly Presumed Truths* (1646) was the first English work to discuss the origin of blackness in detail.

la Bible first published in 1722, compiled by the Benedictine monk, Augustin Calmet.

Throughout western Christendom, Calmet's dictionary became for the Bible what Webster's dictionary has been for the English language. Calmet's irenic approach made the work acceptable in many circles. Even the fiercely Calvinist Jonathan Edwards recorded praise of this authoritative source.¹⁰⁸ The evident erudition, which displayed awareness of Protestant and Jewish learning as well, was impressive. The dictionary appeared in at least thirty printings and editions in at least four languages (French, English, Latin, and Dutch) published in at least five countries over two continents in the course of two centuries, more than a match for Browne. What made Calmet's work so influential was that the curse of Ham appeared not in a tract of obscurantist or special pleading, but neutrally in the midst of a dictionary article, *s.v. Cham*, *Supplément au Dictionnaire Historique....*, second revised edition, Paris, 1728.¹⁰⁹

Between the original and revised editions, Calmet introduced a significant change. Originally drawing on Jewish and Christian sources alone, he simply stated that Canaan was cursed, possibly because he was the first to see Noah's nakedness. Color is absent. Slavery is down-played.¹¹⁰ In the intervening six years Calmet had come across another hefty tome of French erudition, the *Bibliothèque orientale* of Barthelemy d'Herbelot and Antoine Galland.¹¹¹ Its article on Ham summarized a few Latin excerpts from Tabari that like almost every subsequent discussion emphasized the unrepresentative racism and ignored the universalism of his work. Persuaded by Tabari, Calmet explained that Noah had cursed Ham and Canaan, the effect of

¹⁰⁸ See "Catalogue of Reading", Ms. pp. 4, 35-6, entries 365, 666-667 and 671, Jonathan Edwards Papers, Beinecke Library, Yale University. I thank Jon Butler and Ken Minkema for these references.

¹⁰⁹ vol. 3, pp. 138-139. The numbering of this volume is confusing since in fact it is a revision of the first edition published 6 years earlier.

¹¹⁰ Calmet, *op. cit.*, Paris, 1722, vol. 1, pp. 195-196.

¹¹¹ Barthelémy D'Herbelot, *Bibliothèque Orientale ou dictionnaire universel...*, ed. Antoine Galland, Paris, 1697, p. 425.

which was that they and their descendants were enslaved and that their skin instantly turned black. All blacks are descendants of Ham and Canaan. Calmet's authoritative argument weakened the case that Canaan alone was cursed and strengthened the case that Ham was included, reinforcing racial slavery, since Ham was the father of Ethiopia -- and here I intentionally use the conventional spelling. Duly translated and distributed, this matter of fact statement spread to pulpits far and wide from Paris to Oxford to Amsterdam and across the Atlantic to Boston, New York, and Atlanta. In the new United States, Calmet's message was enhanced by the lavish five volume edition published in Charlestown Massachusetts by Samuel Etheridge between 1812-1817, the most elaborate ever published. Samuel Etheridge was a successful commercial publisher with a keen sense of the American market. A commitment of such magnitude which included hundreds of tables, maps, and images could only have been undertaken with sure confidence in sales. The edition that Etheridge reprinted included appendices that addressed the important Bible debates of the day. Included was one over the vexed question of who was cursed, Ham? or Canaan? Calmet's second edition had imprecated Ham, but further evidence would not hurt.

The Etheridge edition argued that a passage from an ancient Hindu text, the *Padma Purana*, recently published by the Asiatic Society and translated by its leading light, the distinguished Sanskrit scholar Sir William Jones, independently supported Tabari's claim that Ham was the one cursed. The passage recapitulated the story of a king's three sons, here renamed Sarma, Kharma and Jyapati. Their father, the king, was drunk and naked. Kharma failed to cover him. When the king awoke he cursed Kharma, "Thou shalt be the servant of servants". Now an independent ancient authority had proved that Ham and the Hamites were indeed cursed with slavery. The article by Francis Wilford that incorporated Jones' translations appeared in 1792. However in 1805 Wilford confessed to an embarrassing discovery, the verses about Sarma (Shem), Kharma

(Ham), and Jyapati (Japhet) were not in the *Padma Purana*. Decades earlier he had hired at some expense a Hindu pandit to review Sanskrit literature in search of the answers to his important questions. He sought ancient pagan resolution of the obscurities of the Bible. The pandit produced what was requested, but years later Wilford was mortified to learn that he was complicit in a fraud. The obliging assistant had produced several thousand brand new ancient verses, the sons of the drunken king among them.¹¹² The next edition of Calmet, unlike Wilford, failed to acknowledge the fraud. Well into the 1820s the tainted interpretation of the Curse was reprinted.¹¹³

The argument that elite pro-slavery American divines were not racist since they could unequivocally declare that Canaan and not Ham was the one cursed fails to acknowledge what careful scholars of the Bible have long recognized: the thousands of years of confusion on this very point, a confusion that I have here argued was present at its creation.¹¹⁴ Early Vulgate manuscripts often read Ham for Canaan and medieval artists did the same.¹¹⁵ On the preacher's

¹¹² Thomas R. Trautmann, *Aryans and British India*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997, pp. 90-3.

¹¹³ The Purana account appeared first in Calmet's *Great Dictionary of the Holy Bible... Revised, Corrected, and Augmented, with an entirely new set of plates... under the direction of C[harles] Taylor...* 3 vols., London, 1797-1801 and was unchanged in the elaborate American edition *Augustin Calmet's Great Dictionary of the Holy Bible, Historical Critical, Geographical, and Etymological... Revised, Corrected, and Augmented, with an entirely New Set of Plates, Explanatory, Illustrative, and Ornamental; under the direction of C[harles]. Taylor*, 5 vols. Charlestown, Massachusetts, 1812-1817, vol. 3, pp. 25-27, as well as in the English reprint, *Calmet's Dictionary of the Holy Bible...*, London, 1823, vol. 4, *Fragments Illustrating ... the Holy Scriptures... from the Most Esteemed and Authentic Voyages and Travels into the East... Intended as a Continued Appendix to Calmet's Dictionary of the Holy Bible*, fragment DXXIX, pp. 63-65, but compare cautionary note in volume 3, fragment XIX.

¹¹⁴ In his effort to absolve the South's proslavery religious elite of biblically-based racism, Eugene Genovese, even goes so far as to claim that the Bible did NOT demonstrate, what every nineteenth century Bible-believer, black and white, took for granted, "that the blacks descended from Ham", Eugene D. Genovese, *A Consuming Fire, the Fall of the Confederacy in the Mind of the White Christian South*, Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1998, 81.

¹¹⁵ Including the oldest extant manuscript, *Pentateuchus Turonensis*, Paris Bibliothèque nationale, NAL 2334 (VI-VII centuries), 9:25, f. 11v and three other early versions, see *Biblia Sacra iuxta Latinam*

bookshelf, the Etheridge Calmet *à la orientale* and *à l'indienne* provided authoritative evidence acceptable even to the Edwards-inspired elite. If they continued to believe that the Bible said Canaan was cursed, given the common sense implications of Ham's actions and the evidence newly available in this distinguished publication, their confidence would be shaken. The matter could not remain open and shut. Influenced by Calmet through others who read him, by contrast the influential Josiah Priest confidently claimed that the authoritative Arabic of Genesis, "a language of equal authority to the Hebrew", establishes that Ham was the one accursed.¹¹⁶

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Through this paper, I have sought to demonstrate that a pattern has emerged in the slow construction of Noah's Curse to justify racial slavery. On the one hand, it provided too plastic a justification for inhumanity of whatever sort to be ignored. On the other hand, at least for the finer of spirit, it was too ignoble an attitude to one's fellow-humans to embrace wholeheartedly and unequivocally. And so a compromise evolved. It would be allowed into one's tradition, even as it was being branded outside it. A crucial step in the acceptance of the curse in Euro-America occurred not merely when the slave trade triumphed not uncoincidentally with Calmet's revision of his article on Ham for the 1728 edition, but also when the *Dictionary* attributed it to a non-Christian, Muslim source, and a century later to a Hindu source. Similarly, a crucial step in the diffusion of the racist story in the world of Islam nine hundred years earlier occurred when Tabari incorporated it into his universal history, while attributing it to a non-Muslim, Jewish source. And earlier still, Hellenistic notions of color identity mingled with strongly articulated biblical servitudinism to initiate the ambiguous and vague statements by Christian Fathers and Jewish

Vulgatam Versionem ad Codicum Fidem, Henri Quentin, ed., Rome, 1926, 175. Around 1300 the famous bronze portals of the San Zeno Church in Verona depict the enslavement of Ham, not Canaan.

¹¹⁶ Priest, *Slavery*, 77.

Rabbis that would later be made into the Curse. By so doing each was able to put the blame for degrading one Other on yet another.

The Curse of Ham as the justification for the degradation of the dark peoples in the United States over the past centuries was a triumph for religious polylogue. It pulled together many different origins, like the clues to a puzzle in a children's fantasy novel. It incorporated an abiding rich, complex, and contradictory psychologically insightful yet denial-filled understanding of slavery with an early-modern imperative to discover, seize, populate, and dominate all corners of the earth. Incrementally it emerged over the millennia at the interstices of cultural exchange: First, between Judaism, Christianity, and the harvest of Hellenism. Second, between all three and the rise of Islam. Third, during Europe's exploration and exploitation of the world when all these diverse influences came together and found a ready audience in those eager to make money off human bodies.