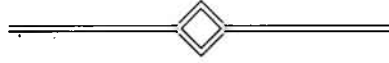


# PISTIS IN PAPYRI AND INSCRIPTIONS



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

“Faith” (πίστις *pistis*) was so important to early Christians that it took center stage in the religious language of the early Christian movement and developed into its central identity marker. No other Jewish or Greco-Roman body of literature uses the *pistis* word group as intensively as the NT. The noun πίστις and the verb πιστεύειν *pisteuein* each occur over 240 times in the NT; the adjective πιστός *pistos* is used 67 times. “Faith” not only describes the self-understanding of an individual Christ follower but also operates as the social marker of the earliest Christ groups. The explosive increase in talk of faith corresponds to the fact that “Jesus-devotion appeared quickly and very early, more like a volcanic eruption than an incremental process.”<sup>1</sup> Faith relates both to the person of Jesus—namely, his words and deeds, but also to what God has done in Christ, specifically the resurrection. In the context of early Christianity, however, the *pistis* lexicon is not limited to the religious realm but is associated with a plethora of meanings; it is elastic and multivalent.<sup>2</sup> The noun *pistis* can denote both a subjective attitude (“faith,” “trust,” or “confidence”) and also that which can stimulate the attitude of *pistis*—that is, “honesty,” “trustworthiness,” “faithfulness,” or “responsibility” with reference to persons or interpersonal relations, and “assurance,” “pledge,” “guarantee,” “argument,” or “proof” with reference to things. Correspondingly, the adjective *pistos* includes the aspects of both “believing”/“trusting” and “faithful”/“trustworthy.” The verb *pisteuein* can mean “to believe,” “to trust,” “to entrust,” “to feel confident that,” “to put faith in,” or “to rely on.”

For decades, exegetical research on the NT understanding of “faith” (πίστις) had come to a virtual standstill. After the pioneering work of Adolf Schlatter and Rudolf Bultmann in the last century, the last word seemed to have been spoken.<sup>3</sup> A glaring mismatch ensued between the importance of faith to the early Christians and scholarly endeavors to illuminate its meaning. Since the turn of the millennium, however, the study of faith has enjoyed something of a renaissance. In recent years, a considerable number of monographs and compendia have appeared that investigate its theological and sociological role. It is unsurprising that Paul’s theology of faith attracts the most attention; the ambiguous phrase

1. Larry W. Hurtado, “Resurrection-Faith and the ‘Historical’ Jesus,” *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 11 (2013): 35–36.

2. Teresa Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith: Pistis and Fides in the Early Roman Empire and the Early Churches* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 13. Cf., e.g., Gerald F. Downing, “Ambiguity, Ancient Semantics, and Faith,” *NTS* 56 (2010): 139–62; Thomas Schumacher, *Zur Entstehung christlicher Sprache: Eine Untersuchung der paulinischen Idiomatik und der Verwendung des Begriffes Πίστις*, BBB 168 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012).

3. Adolf Schlatter, *Der Glaube im Neuen Testament*, 6th ed. (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1982 [1885]); Rudolf Bultmann, “πίστις κτλ.,” *TDNT* 6:174–82, 197–228.

πίστις Χριστοῦ *pistis Christou* proved to be particularly enticing for scholars, triggering heated debates especially in Anglophone exegesis. However, despite the renewed interest in the *pistis* language of early Christians, the comparative potential of the Greco-Roman and Hellenistic-Jewish context remains far from exhausted. A noteworthy exception is Teresa Morgan's monograph *Roman Faith and Christian Faith* (2015). At the outset of her work, she expounds a "basic principle of cultural historiography":

New communities forming themselves within an existing culture do not typically take language in common use in the world around them and immediately assign to it radical new meanings. New meanings may, and often do, evolve, but evolution takes time. This is all the more likely to be the case where the new community is a missionary one. One does not communicate effectively with potential converts by using language in a way which they will not understand. In its earliest years, therefore, we should not expect the meaning of Christian *pistis* (or *fides*) language to be wholly *sui generis*. We should expect those who use it to understand it within the range of meanings which are in play in the world around them, and our study of it should be culturally embedded.<sup>4</sup>

Morgan's focus on the ancient encyclopedia of faith illuminates countless facets of the NT *pistis* lexicon. Overall, she emphasizes the relational aspect of faith: "*pistis* and *fides* are fundamentally relational concepts and practices, centring on trust, trustworthiness, faithfulness and good faith."<sup>5</sup> She adds: "*pistis/fides* (along with justice, mercy, and a few others) is one of those qualities that can only be practiced socially: it is inherently relational and characteristically expressed in action toward other human beings (or, occasionally, animals)."<sup>6</sup>

Morgan's work is a major step to a comprehensive understanding of the *pistis* lexicon; yet she does not devote any particular focus to documentary sources. Still, the wealth of inscriptions and papyri promises rich results. The epigraphic evidence for the *pistis* word group is abundant, and we can only scratch the surface of some of those inscriptions that seem most interesting for NT studies. As regards the papyri, we are in a rather fortunate position, for Peter Arzt-Grabner and others have surveyed the papyrological evidence. I will follow his taxonomy and focus on some particularly instructive features and examples.<sup>7</sup>

## 2. INSCRIPTIONS

### 2.1 Entrusting (*Pisteuein*) Money in Manumission

The verb *pisteuein* in the sense of "to entrust" plays an eminent role in the so-called sacral manumission<sup>8</sup> found in central Greece, particularly in Delphi. In Delphi alone, over twelve hundred manumissions are attested in around a thousand inscriptions, spanning

4. Morgan, *Roman Faith*, 4.

5. Morgan, *Roman Faith*, 503.

6. Morgan, *Roman Faith*, 472.

7. Peter Arzt-Grabner, "Zum alltagssprachlichen Hintergrund von Πίστις," in *Glaube: Das Verständnis des Glaubens im frühen Christentum und in seiner jüdischen und hellenistisch-römischen Umwelt*, ed. Jörg Frey, Benjamin Schliesser, and Nadine Ueberschaer, WUNT 373 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 241–49. He draws on preliminary sketches by Christina Kreinecker, Franz Winter, and himself, published in different volumes of PKNT, which in turn depend on MM. See further Nijay K. Gupta, *Paul and the Language of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020), 44–46.

8. Traditionally, among private manumissions, scholars distinguish between "secular manumissions," which remain in the civic sphere, and "sacral manumissions," which involve the agency of a god. Slavery and, with it, manumission are among the most debated topics in ancient history. For a full discussion, see Rachel Zelnick-Abramovitz, *Not Wholly Free: The Concept of Manumission and the Status of Manumitted Slaves in the Ancient Greek World* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

from the beginning of the second century BCE to the late first century CE.<sup>9</sup> They represent our largest corpus of manumission documents; they are engraved on polygonal stones in the retaining wall along the road that leads to the temple of Apollo. Among these materials we find some nine hundred (!) occurrences of the verb *pisteuein*. In fact, the overwhelming bulk of epigraphic evidence for *pisteuein* as a whole comes from the Delphic manumission records. The following text is typical (*SGDI* II 1685.1–5):<sup>10</sup>

Under the archonship of Thrasylkeos, in the month of Herakleios, Athambos son of Athanion sold [ἀπέδοτο *apedoto*] to Pythian Apollo a female slave [lit. a female body] named Harmodika, from Elateia by origin, at the price of six silver minae, and he [i.e., Athambos] received the whole price, since Harmodika entrusted [ἐπίστευσε *episteuse*] the purchase money to the god [i.e., Apollo], under the condition that she is free and not to be claimed [as a slave] by anyone forever, and she can do whatever she wants and go wherever she wants. Guarantors according to the law of the city.

This example illustrates the pattern of the Delphic inscriptions, which are very formulaic and include these elements:<sup>11</sup> date, name of the chief magistrate (archon), month, the name of the master, the transaction (“he/they sold”), the conditions of the sale, a reference to the god, an identification of the slave, the price, a statement of the receipt of the full price, the agency of the god, the slave’s new legal status, and finally the name of the guarantor(s). In our context the idea of the god’s brokership is of particular relevance: in the aforementioned example, the slave Harmodika provided the money for her ransom but is confronted with the problem that, as a piece of personal property without rights, she cannot act as a party in a legal transaction. She must entrust (*pisteuein*) her money to the god, who in this legal play would hand it over to her master Athambos on her behalf. When the slave entrusts the money to the god, she trusts that he will fulfill his responsibility and transfer the money so that the manumission is legally valid.

The reciprocal dynamics of entrusting someone with a gift and trusting in their responsible dealing with this gift resonate with Paul’s letters: he affirms that the Jews have been “entrusted” with the oracles of God (Rom 3:2, ἐπιστευθησαν), and he describes himself as “entrusted” with the gospel (1 Cor 9:17; Gal 2:7, πεπίστευμαι; 1 Thess 2:4, πιστευθηναί). Morgan has observed that to “be entrusted with something, in any sphere of life from politics to law, commerce, or cult, is an honourable and responsible position . . . , but it is normally a means to an end, not an end in itself.”<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, a growing number of scholars interpret the puzzling phrase μέτρον πίστεως *metron pisteōs* (Rom 12:3) in the sense of “measure of entrusted responsibility,” “measure of stewardship,” or “measure of a trusteeship.”<sup>13</sup> The current discussion largely ignores that this interpretation has been a

9. Cf. Dominique Mulliez, “Les actes d’affranchissement delphiques,” *Cahiers du Centre Gustave Glotz* 3 (1992): 31–44.

10. See, e.g., David M. Lewis and Sara Zanollo, “Freedmen/Freedwomen: Greek,” in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (online edition, published May 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199381135.013.8019>.

11. I follow the summary in B. H. McLean, *An Introduction to Greek Epigraphy of the Hellenistic and Roman Periods: From Alexander the Great down to the Reign of Constantine (323 B.C.–A.D. 337)* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 295–97.

12. Morgan, *The New Testament and the Theology of Trust* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 43.

13. John C. Poirier, “The Measure of Stewardship: Πίστεως in Romans 12:3,” *TynBul* 59 (2008): 145–52; John K. Goodrich, “‘Standard of Faith’ or ‘Measure of a Trusteeship’? A Study in Romans 12:3,” *CBQ* 74 (2012): 753–72. See, in response, Stanley E. Porter and Hughson T. Ong, “‘Standard of Faith’ or ‘Measure of a Trusteeship’? A Study in Romans 12:3—A Response,” *JGRChJ* 9 (2013): 97–103.

dominant one from the time of the church fathers to the nineteenth century. Chrysostom, for instance, speaks of faith as the *charisma* with which God has entrusted the believers; God “consoles the one who had the lesser, and humbles the one who had the greater share.”<sup>14</sup> The debate about this Pauline phrase is still open, but the epigraphic evidence from Delphi is one piece of evidence that the notion of entrustedness and trusteeship was part of the semantic range of *pistis/pisteuein*.

## 2.2 *Pistis* as an Individual, Civic, and Political Virtue

The well-known honorific decree found on a stela from the city of Sestos in Thrace (ca. 133–120 BCE) (*OGIS* 339 = I.Sestos 1) honors the gymnasiarch Menas for his generosity to the gymnasium of Sestos.<sup>15</sup> He “was to receive annually at the games a gold crown from the *epheboi* and *neoi*, front seating at the games for himself and his descendants, and the erection of a bronze statue of himself.”<sup>16</sup> The benefactor is honored not only for his own sake but also that “all others, as they see the People bestowing honors on exceptional men, might emulate the noblest qualities and be moved to virtue, to the end that the common good might be advanced as all aim ever to win a reputation for doing something beneficial for our home city.”<sup>17</sup> Much more could be said on this and comparable decrees, but we will focus on two features of the decree’s *pistis* language.

First, the decree commends the remarkable civic loyalty of Menas, as he “devoutly guarded the responsibilities [*πίσταις*] that were entrusted to him” (*OGIS* 339, lines 11–12; cf. line 53). Decrees frequently use *pistis* to highlight that the honored has shown *pistis*, referring to that person’s “responsibility,” “loyalty,” or “fidelity.”<sup>18</sup> Another striking example for such *pistis* is the honorary decree for a certain Herostratos, the son of Dorcalion, which was carved on a marble block at Poemanenon in Mysia, probably in the early decades of the first century BCE (*OGIS* 438).<sup>19</sup> It features a list of virtues including *pistis*: Herostratos “has been a good man and has excelled in faithfulness and excellence and justice and piety [*πίσταις καὶ ἀρετῇ καὶ δικαιοσύνῃ καὶ εὐσεβείαις*] and [ . . . ] has exercised the greatest zeal [ . . . ]” (*OGIS* 438, lines 7–9). One is immediately reminded of 2 Peter 1:5–7 and the catalogue of virtues: “make every effort to add to your faithfulness [*pistis*], excellence; and to excellence, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, piety.” The correspondence of vocabulary and ideas strikes the eye and at the same time underlines the need for exegetical sensitivity toward the semantic breadth of *pistis*. In the decrees as well as in 2 Peter 1:5, *pistis* accentuates the “responsibility for a trust” that “is displayed in actual performance, and this in turn merits the term *aretē*.”<sup>20</sup>

14. Chrysostom, *Homiliae in epistulam ad Romanos* 21.3 (PG 60:599).

15. Frederick W. Danker, *Benefactor: Epigraphic Study of a Graeco-Roman and New Testament Semantic Field* (St. Louis: Clayton, 1982), sec. 17, provides a translation.

16. Thus the summary in Jim Harrison, *Paul and the Ancient Celebrity Circuit: The Cross and Moral Transformation*, WUNT 430 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 153.

17. Harrison, *Paul and the Ancient Celebrity Circuit*, 153.

18. Some important examples have been collected in Frederick W. Danker, “2 Peter 1: A Solemn Decree,” *CBQ* 40 (1978): 64–82, here 72: a quaestor (*SIG* 700, lines 35–36), ephors (*SIG* 932, lines 5–7), and an appointed priest (*OGIS* 331, line 57). Oftentimes, the idea of entrusting someone with *pistis* is expressed by the verb ἐγγειρίζειν *encheirizein*. On the list of virtues in 2 Peter in the context of the ethical discourse of the time, see also Benjamin Schliesser, “Ethik im 2. Petrusbrief,” in *Ethik des Neuen Testaments*, ed. Ruben Zimmermann (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, forthcoming).

19. See Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East: The New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts of the Graeco-Roman World*, 4th ed., translated by Lionel R. M. Strachan (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1927 [1908]), 322.

20. Danker, “Solemn Decree,” 72.

Returning to the Sestos stela, we should, secondly, take notice of a phrase that refers to Menas and others, “who would hold on to their responsibility piously and justly” (τοὺς τὴν πίστιν εὐσεβῶς τε καὶ δικαίως τηρήσοντες *tous tēn pistin eusebōs te kai dikaiōs tērēsontas*; OGIS 339, lines 46–47). The notion of “holding on” to one’s *pistis* is quite frequent and occurs in various settings. The Roman general L. Cornelius Sulla, probably in 81 BCE, praises the Stratonikeians because “at every opportunity they have kept their *pistis* toward us conscientiously [ἐν παντὶ καιρῶι τὴν πρὸς ἡμᾶς π[ι]στὶν εἰλικρινῶς τετηρηκότας *en panti kairōi tēn pros hēmas pistin eilikrinōs pistin*]” (OGIS 441 = OGIS 10, line 5). In a second letter on the same inscription he reaffirms that in times of peace the people Stratonikeia “kept their goodwill and *pistis* and friendship [συνετήρησεν τὴν ἰδίαν [εὐνοϊάν τε καὶ πίστιν καὶ φιλίαν] *synetērēsen tēn idian eunoian te kai pistin kai philian*] toward the people of Rome” (*Lagina* 10, lines 36–37), and in times of war “always kept their existing goodwill and loyalty and alliance [συνετήρησεν αἰετὴν ὑπάρχουσαν αὐτῶι εὐνοϊαν καὶ π[ι]στὶν] καὶ συμμαχί[αν] *synetērēsen aei tēn hyparchousan autōi eunomian kai pistin kai symmachian*] toward the people of Rome (*Lagina* 10, lines 44–45). His statements emphatically highlight their uncompromising loyalty to Rome.<sup>21</sup> When the Ephesian gymnasiarch M. Aurelius Agathopus in the second or third century CE professes, “I have kept the faith” (τὴν πίστιν ἐτήρησα *tēn pistin etērēsa*; I.Eph 1587b, lines 6–7), he has in mind his loyalty and faithfulness with respect to his civic responsibility. Even when the Christian M. Iulius Eugenius, who was a soldier and later became a bishop for twenty-five years in Laodicea Combusta in Lycaonia, professes on his epitaph that “he has kept the faith of the Christians” (τὴν τῶν Χριστιανῶν πίστιν φυλάσσω *tēn tōn Chreistianōn pistin phylassōn*), he stresses his loyalty to Christianity despite an abundance of torture he had to endure (330–350 CE; ICG 371, line 9).<sup>22</sup> Accordingly, when the author of 2 Timothy 4:7 professes, “I have kept the faith” (τὴν πίστιν τετήρηκα *tēn pistin tetērēka*), his primary intention is not to say that he has stuck to a certain belief system but that he safeguarded and remained loyal to the responsibility with which he was entrusted.<sup>23</sup>

A rather carelessly written inscription on a stela erected by a woman named Aphphias at Hamidiye in Lydia notes that Aphphias “did not keep the faith” (οὐκ ἐτήρησε τὴν πίστιν *ouk etērēse tēn pistin*)—that is, did not remain loyal to her undertaking to marry her daughter Ioulia, daughter of Kosmos, to Gaios (SEG 57.1159, late imperial).<sup>24</sup> Aphphias

21. *Pistis* pays off: as a result of Stratonikeia’s loyalty, the Senate extended to the city, at the request of Sulla, alliance and the privilege of keeping its own jurisdiction, laws, and customs.

22. See further “Inscription ICG 371,” *Inscriptiones Christianae Graecae*, <http://repository.edition-topoi.org/collection/ICG/object/371>. Several other inscriptions praise an individual for keeping (τηρεῖν *tērein*, συντηρεῖν *syneterein*, φυλάσσειν *phylassein*, διαφυλάσσειν *diaphylassein*) their *pistis*—e.g., a physician (IG IX,1<sup>3</sup> 3:750; Lokris; 200–150 BCE), the *dikastagogs* Theugenes (IG XII,4 1:59 = SEG 48:1112, lines 38–39; Kos; after mid-2nd c. BCE). Alfons Weiser, *Der zweite Brief an Timotheus*, EKKNT 16/1 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2003), 307 with n572, refers to instances of this phrase from literature; e.g., Polybius, *Hist.* 6.56,13; Josephus, *J.W.* 2.21; 6.345.

23. Cf. Bernhard Mutschler, *Glaube in den Pastoralbriefen: Pistis als Mitte christlicher Existenz*, WUNT 256 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 376–77. If, in the Pastoral Epistles, *pistis* in the accusative is dependent on a verb (1 Tim 5:12; 2 Tim 4:7; Titus 2:10), it takes the meaning “faithfulness” or the like (cf. 1 Tim 1:4) (cf. Mutschler, *Glaube*, 377). In all other instances it denotes “faith” with various nuances (cf. the table in Mutschler, *Glaube*, 384). Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, 312, has commented that both the author of 2 Timothy and M. Aurelius Agathopus “are drawing from the same source from the stock of formulae current in Asia Minor.”

24. The narrative behind the inscription is not easy to retrieve. I follow the interpretation of Richard L. Gordon, “Negotiating the Temple-Script: Women’s Narratives among the ‘Confession-Texts’ of Western Asia Minor,” *Religion in the Roman Empire* 2 (2016): 227–55, here 241. Alternatively, as Hasan Malay seems to suggest, Aphphias was not the mother but a marriage-broker, and Ioulia broke her obligation by committing

was afflicted by illness because she had broken her word. Such a negative statement on a person's lack of fidelity is rather unique.

### 2.3 Religious *Pistis* and the *Apistos* of Epidauros

The fascinating fourth-century BCE inscriptions discovered at the sanctuary of Asklepios in Epidauros (*IG IV<sup>2</sup> 1, 121–24*) preserve seventy healing reports (*iamata*), some of which refer to the disbelief or faltering belief of the suppliants and to the negative consequences of their lack of faith. New Testament scholars have often referred to these stories to illuminate the miracle narratives of the Gospels, such as the healing of the epileptic in Mark 9:14–29. The stylized reports adopt a narrative pattern with a brief description of the sick person and the disease, the report about the incubation in the healing sanctuary, during which the god appears in a vision and mostly performs his miraculous cure, and the declaration of a successful healing or, less frequently, a punishment miracle and a mantic oracle. The reports offer remarkable insight into the piety of ordinary people who sought and received help from the god and therefore offered votives in gratitude for the cure. They issue a clear warning against disbelieving the god's power to perform miracles. “Unbelievers and the dishonest are visibly punished for their behavior: by a mark on their forehead (*iamata* 7), blindness (*iamata* 11.55), a fall from their ‘high horse’ (*iamata* 36), or being forced to publicly confess and ask forgiveness of Asclepius (*iamata* 47). Whoever doubts the *fordnamis* ‘power’ (*iamata* 37) of the god, to him the god demonstrates it.”<sup>25</sup>

The keyword “disbelief” occurs in the context of a report about a physiotherapeutic healing of a paralytic (*iamata* 3):

A man who could not move the fingers of his hand except for one came to the god as a suppliant. When he saw the votive tablets in the sanctuary, he did not believe [*ἀπίστει apistei*] in the cures and made fun of the inscriptions. As he slept (in the sanctuary), he had a vision: it seemed to him, while he was playing knucklebone close by the temple and was about to throw the knucklebone, the god appeared and jumped on his hand and stretched out his fingers; when he stepped away—so he dreamt—he bent his hand and stretched out each finger one by one; having stretched them all out, the god had asked him whether he still wished to disbelieve [*ἀπίστησοῖ apistēsōi*] the inscriptions on the votive tablets in the sanctuary; and he said no. “Because you once disbelieved them, even though they were not incredible, your name in future shall be Incredible/Disbeliever [*Ἄπιστος ὄνομα Apistos onoma*],” he said. When day came, he emerged cured (from the sanctuary).

There are many points of comparison between the healing of the epileptic child in Mark 9 and the report from Epidauros. Most interesting in our context is their reflection on faith, doubt, and disbelief and the divine reaction: the child's father cries out, “I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24 NRSV), whereas the sick man shows his disbelief by ridiculing the inscriptions. Both seem to doubt the divine power (cf. v. 22: “if you can”). After an intense dialogue between his father and Jesus, the epileptic boy is healed by means of

adultery. Cf. Peter Herrmann and Hasan Malay, *New Documents from Lydia*, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, Denkschriften 340 = Ergänzungsbande zu den Tituli Asiae Minoris 24 (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2007), 76–77, no. 52.

25. Martin Ebner, *Die Stadt als Lebensraum der ersten Christen: Das Urchristentum in seiner Umwelt I*, Grundrisse zum Neuen Testament, Das Neue Testament Deutsch—Ergänzungsreihe 1/1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), 313 (my translation).

an exorcistic verbal act (v. 25).<sup>26</sup> The therapy at the Asclepius sanctuary is quite crude, leading to a dialogue between the god and the healed, in which the man remains in the background, merely answering no to the question whether he still wishes to disbelieve. The exchange is not concerned with the specific circumstances of the disease, unlike Mark 9:17–18, 21–22, but rather with the credibility of the documented healings. The god judges doubt and disbelief, in contrast to Mark 9:14–29, as culpable and punishes the incredulous man by a symbolic change of name. Nevertheless, the sick man is cured despite his unbelief, as is the child of the vacillating father. On the narrative level, the miracle precedes the belief in the unbelievable reports, though the suppliant likely had trust and expectations when setting off to the sanctuary. In many NT narratives, the miracle follows personal faith in the miracle-worker Jesus (“your faith has healed/saved you”; cf. Mark 9:23). From a pragmatic point of view, the inscriptions as a whole are something like persuasive arguments for the epiphany and power of the god, considering the fact that the reports are met with skepticism, doubt, ridicule, and disbelief.<sup>27</sup> The priests chose the name *Apistos* for propaganda purposes.<sup>28</sup> Mark, too, has a persuasive and didactic concern: its meaning transcends what is immediately told. It is a story of faith, doubt, and disbelief in the face of the epiphany of God and with an astonishing climax: faith overcomes human limitations and partakes in the divine power.<sup>29</sup>

A few examples of religious *pistis* (in a broad sense) will enrich the picture. In an honorary inscription from Colophon from about 200–150 BCE, a certain Menophilus of Smyrna is commended by the people of Colophon for his assent to be the director of the sanctuary of Apollo at Claros. He is described as *chresmologos*—that is, an interpreter and possibly recipient of oracles—and praised for his “faithfulness toward the god and the people” (τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ πίστεως καὶ τῆς τοῦ δήμου) (SEG 42.1065, line 14). A conspicuous syntactical parallel to this objective genitive is Jesus’s challenge to “have faith in God” (Mark 11:22).<sup>30</sup>

A remarkable Jewish inscription praises the exemplary virtues of seven OT figures whom the readers are encouraged to emulate. It was found at Sobata in the Negev desert (SEG 31, 1449, probably late antique) and reads: “[In faithfulness like Abraham (πίστῃν Ἀβραάμ *pistin Abraam*)]. In friendship (?) like Isaac. In hope like Jacob. In humility like Moses. In glory like David. In wisdom like Solomon. In endurance like Job” (SEG 31, 1449, lines 2–8). Note, however, that the line on Abraham’s faithfulness has been restored, but quite plausibly so.<sup>31</sup> The editor Avraham Negev supposes that the text was copied from a liturgical, exegetical, or literary text, but its purpose remains obscure. If the conjecture

26. See Roy D. Kotansky, “Magical Papyri,” in this present volume (ch. 32).

27. Cf. Gerd Schunack, “Glaube in griechischer Religiosität,” in *Antikes Judentum und frühes Christentum*, ed. Bernd Kollmann, Wolfgang Reinbold, and Annette Steudel, FS Hartmut Stegemann, BZNW 97 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999), 324.

28. Cf. Heikki Solin, “Inscriptliche Wunderheilungsberichte aus Epidauros,” *ZAC* 17 (2013): 29. The name *Apistos* is nowhere attested in Greek anthroponymy, though the female name *Apistia* is found on an Attic curse tablet for a slave (Solin, “Inscriptliche Wunderheilungsberichte,” 29n80).

29. Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide*, trans. John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 595.

30. Such instances of objective-genitive constructions are often neglected in the *pistis Christou* debate in Pauline studies. They are not as rare as is often claimed. Several examples are found in literary sources as well; e.g., Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 1.6.3, 5: πίστις τοῦ θεοῦ *pistis tou theiou*; Plutarch, *Sera* 3, 549B: πίστις τῆς προνοίας *pistis tēs pronoias*.

31. The excavation team led by Harris Colt surveyed Sobata in 1933–1935 and recorded this inscription. A fire destroyed most of the records of the expedition, and no other scholar documented seeing the inscription, so that Avraham Negev could only publish the archived transcription of the text. See Avraham Negev, *The Greek Inscriptions from the Negev* (Jerusalem: Franciscan, 1981), 63, no. 71.

proves correct, we would then have an instructive epigraphic example of highlighting Abraham's *pistis* present in many other Jewish and early Christian works, such as Hebrews and the letters of Paul and James.

## 2.4 Personified and Deified *Pistis*

The sixth-century poet Theognis of Megara expresses his solemn lament that “*Pistis*, the great goddess,” has departed and returned to Olympus; as a consequence, deceitfulness and duplicity might take the upper hand, and *Elpis* (Hope) is the only good god remaining among mankind.<sup>32</sup> Later sources document a temple dedicated to *Pistis* in Athens,<sup>33</sup> and excavations carried out on the capitol in Rome have brought to light a monumental cult statue of a deified *Fides*, which belonged to one of the most significant temple structures of late republican Rome;<sup>34</sup> it was positioned prominently right next to the temple of Jupiter at the southwest part of the hill.<sup>35</sup> It is commonly held that the foundation of the temple dates to the third century BCE and that it was rebuilt between 115 and 109 BCE.<sup>36</sup>

A different, much less monumental and ostentatious example of deified *pistis* is found on the island of Delos in the Aegean Sea. An inscription records that a group of nine *Compataliasts* “dedicated (the statue of) *Pistis* to the gods” (τὴν Πίστιν ὑ θεοῖς ὑ ἀνέθηκαν *tēn pistin theois anethēkan*; I.Delos 1761, line 19). The designation “*Compataliasts*” is only found in Delos<sup>37</sup> and refers to members of religious associations of slaves and a few freedmen who administer or celebrate *Compitalia*—that is, an annual festival honoring the household deities of the crossroads (*Lares Compitales*). The group of men chose to attribute the divine quality of *pistis* to the *lares*, who are simply called “the gods.” They are probably understood here “as the ultimate guardians of commerce and trade, of the networks created and protected by ‘good faith,’” and are expected to enable “good faith” in the men’s relationships with each other and with their masters.<sup>38</sup>

The character of (divine) *pistis* is supposed to become manifest in individuals bearing this very name. Of the thirty-five thousand names included in the *Lexicon of Greek Personal Names*,<sup>39</sup> the entry for *Pistis* lists sixteen instances, which seems to indicate limited popularity. In one instance from Mytilene in Lesbos, a man seems to be called by that name (*IG XII*<sup>2</sup> 404, line 1). More frequently, the name *Pistos* was employed. According to the *Lexicon of Greek Personal Names*, there are ninety-three instances of this name, all borne by males.

32. Theognis, *Fragment* 1.1135. Contemporaneous to emergent Christianity; the rhetorician Valerius Maximus (*Memorabilia*, 6.6.pr.) calls the “venerable goddess *Fides*” “the most secure pledge of human well-being” (*certissimum salutis humanae pignus*) and thus combines *Pistis* with salvation.

33. The Athenian ἱερὸν Πίστειος *Hieron Pisteōs* is actually dedicated to the Roman goddess *Fides*.

34. Cf. Christoph Reusser, *Der Fidestempel auf dem Kapitol in Rom und seine Ausstattung: Ein Beitrag zur den Ausgrabungen an der Via del Mare und um das Kapitol 1926–1943* (Rome: “L’Erma” Di Bretschneider, 1993), 78.

35. Reusser, *Der Fidestempel*, 61–62. Cf. Pliny the Elder, *Nat.* 35.100; Cicero, *Off.* 3.104.

36. Generally, references to the personified *Fides* in literature as well as depictions of *Fides* on coins are frequent and richly varied, with clasped right hands (= “good faith”), ears of corn, baskets/plates of fruit, and cornucopias. Especially between the reigns of Vespasian and Constantine, the goddess is often embossed on coins; the earliest depiction of *Pistis*/*Fides* on a stater (an ancient coin) dates to the third century BCE and has been found in lower Italy (cf. Mutschler, *Glaube*, 66–67; Morgan, *Roman Faith*, 83–84).

37. Cf. I.Delos 1760–66, 1768–71, which all date to the first decade of the first century BCE.

38. Harriet I. Flower, *The Dancing Lares and the Serpent in the Garden: Religion at the Roman Street Corner* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 179.

39. *The Lexicon of Greek Personal Names*, www.lgpn.ox.ac.uk. It seems, however, that the list is not complete; to point out just one omission, the epitaph of the Antiochian Philiskos mentions at the end that his wife *Pistis* was buried in the same grave (Rhodos on Rhodes, 1st c. BCE, I.Rhodom 39).

A noteworthy occurrence of personified (Christian) *pistis* is the so-called Aberkios inscription, an epitaph that is considered one of the earliest extant Christian inscriptions (Hierapolis; ca. 200 CE). Bishop Aberkios of Hierapolis in Phrygia remarks somewhat cryptically that Paul (probably the apostle) has been his travel companion and that “*pistis* [led the way everywhere] (Πίστις πάντη δὲ προήγει) *pistis pantē de proēge*) and prepared [(eucharistic) nourishment] everywhere” with fish, wine, and bread (lines 12–16). Possibly the idea of *pistis* leading the way highlights the social function of *pistis* in establishing identity in times of major travel activities of Christian leaders (Polycarp of Smyrna, Hegesippus, Melito of Sardis), which were intended to strengthen the unity of the congregations they visited.<sup>40</sup> Alternatively, *pistis* could allude to letters of recommendation that were sent to churches in other locations, in which case it would refer to a pledge of good faith.<sup>41</sup> In any case, personified and hypostasized *pistis* are not uncommon in the symbolic world of antiquity, both Christian and non-Christian, and are paralleled, for instance, by a personified σοφία *sophia* in Proverbs (see, e.g., Prov 8:22–31). In a key passage in his letter to the Galatians, Paul speaks of the “coming” (Gal 3:23, 25) of faith. In recent years, much ink has been spilled concerning this passage.<sup>42</sup> As Richard Hays comments, “In these verses, ‘the Faith’ seems to be a quasi-personified (or objectified) entity which is said to appear on stage at a specific point in the unfolding of the salvation historical drama.”<sup>43</sup>

### 3. PAPYRI

#### 3.1 *Pistis* in Legal Transactions and Business

The word *pistis* occurs in numerous legal documentary papyri and proved to be “a highly productive legal notion.”<sup>44</sup> Accordingly, various meanings and nuances of the term have been extrapolated, such as “oath,” “safe-conduct,” “credit,” “guarantee for a credit,” “relationship of trust,” and “pledge.”<sup>45</sup> A noteworthy document penned at the market of Side in Pamphylia (P.Turner 22; 142 CE) preserves a contract for the sale of a slave girl.<sup>46</sup> The text is worth quoting at some length, as it features some important nuances of the *pistis* lexicon in the realm of business as well as remarkable insights into the ancient slave trade (P.Turner 22, lines 2–8):

40. Thus Georg Kretschmar, “Erfahrung der Kirche: Beobachtungen zur Aberkios-Inschrift,” in *Communio Sanctorum: Mélanges offerts à Jean-Jacques von Allmen*, ed. Boris Bobrinskoy et al. (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1982), 73–85.

41. Thus Rosalinde A. Kearsley, in *New Docs* 6, 180. See also “Inscription ICG 1597,” *Inscriptiones Christianae Graecae*, <http://repository.edition-topoi.org/collection/ICG/object/1597>.

42. Cf. Benjamin Schliesser, “‘Christ-Faith’ as an Eschatological Event (Galatians 3.23–26): A ‘Third View’ on Πίστις Χριστοῦ,” *JSNT* 39 (2016): 277–300.

43. Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1–4:11*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 200.

44. José Luis Alonso, “Πίστις in Loan Transactions: A New Interpretation of P.Dion. 11–12,” *JJP* 42 (2012): 9. Note Alonso’s conclusions: “Generations of legal scholars have for centuries devoted their attention to the Roman *fides* from every conceivable point of view. Many aspects of the Greek πίστις remain, instead, virtually unexplored: for legal historians, if not a land of promise, then at least a promising land” (30).

45. See already Walter Schmitz, “H Πίστις in den Papyri” (PhD diss., University of Cologne, 1963), 10–17 (“Eid”), 17–31 (“Schutzbrief”), 32–33 (“Kredit”), 34–64 (“Sicherheitsleistung bei Kreditgeschäften”), 65–91 (“Vertrauensverhältnis, in dem der Vertrauende dem Vertrauensempfänger eine selbständige und eigenverantwortliche Stellung einräumt”), 91–97 (“Bürgschaft”).

46. See S. R. Llewelyn, “The Sale of a Slave-Girl: The New Testament’s Attitude to Slavery,” in *New Docs* 6, 48–55, focusing on the topic of slavery in the NT writings (I follow the translation provided there). See also *BGU* 3.887 (Side; 152 CE), which also documents the sale of a slave girl and features comparable formulaic language and a similar script style.

[Pamphilos (. . .), an Alexandrian, has bought in the marketplace from] Artemidoros (. . .) a slave-girl, [Abaskantis, a Galatian by descent, about 10 years of age for the sum of 280 silver denarii,] with Marcus Aelius [Gavianus acting as guarantor and] declaring [by personal] warrant (τῆ ἰδίᾳ πίστει *tē idia pistei*) [that (the slave-girl) is healthy in accord with the edict . . . not liable to seizure by anyone and likely neither to roam about] nor run away [and without holy illness (= epilepsy). If any of these apply or she is not healthy or a claim to seizure arises against her or part thereof] and is won, then Pamphilos (. . .) [has asked in good faith (πίστει) that the double sum be rightfully paid without summons;] [Artemidoros has agreed to pay (it) in good faith (πίστει) and that he has received the sum; and] on his behalf by personal warrant (τῆ ἰδίᾳ πίστει) and [guarantee Marcus] Aelius Gavianus [has declared these things are so].

The dative πίστει here takes the meaning “in good faith” and codifies the contractual mutuality of the buyer’s request and the seller’s assurance. In relation to the guarantor, the formula τῆ ἰδίᾳ πίστει refers to the warrant that he gives. The mutuality of the *pistis* relationship between the three parties reminds from afar of the (certainly asymmetrical) mutuality of divine *pistis* (Rom 3:2: πίστις τοῦ θεοῦ *pistis tou theou*) and human *pistis*, which is mediated by Christ-*pistis* (Rom 3:22, 26; Gal 2:16, 20; 3:22; Phil 3:9: πίστις Χριστοῦ). To be sure, “Paul’s vision of triangulated bonds of gift” and *pistis*-relationship cannot be fully captured by a transactional model.<sup>47</sup>

A certain Johanna, possibly a Jewish woman,<sup>48</sup> writes to an Epagathos (P.Bad. 2.35 = CPJ 424; Ptolemais Hermeiou; Dec. 16, 87 CE), accusing him of breaking his agreement with her, as he did not acknowledge her as the owner of twenty drachmae and interest: “I am astonished that you have changed (the terms of) your obligation” (θαυμάζω [I. θαυμάζω], πῶς τῆν πίστιν | σου ἤλλαξαι *thaumazō pōs tēn pistin sou ἔllaxai*) (P.Bad. 2.35, lines 6–7).<sup>49</sup> For NT studies, the letter is informative not only regarding its use of the term *pistis* but also because of its emotional and emphatic tone: the reproach against the breach of contract is expressed with the verb θαυμάζειν *thaumazein*, which has a parallel in Galatians 1:6,<sup>50</sup> but nevertheless Johanna ends with an emotional word of farewell and assures Epagathos of her affection. In a letter of a certain Ptollos to an Isas (SB 14.12172; Sept. 3, 7 CE), the writer offers a courteous but firm reminder that Isas has borrowed money from him but not paid it back. Ptollos asserts that he has given him the amount assuming that he is a reliable man: “For if I had not known that you are trustworthy [*pistos*], I would not have lent it to you. Knowing your good faith [τῆν σὴν πίστιν *tēn sēn pistin*], I gave the note to no one [i.e., the note in which the debt is acknowledged, for the purpose

47. David E. Briones, *Paul’s Financial Policy: A Socio-Theological Approach*, LNTS 494 (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 225.

48. The question of Johanna’s Jewishness is discussed in Tal Ilan, “An Addendum to Bagnall and Cribiore, Women’s Letters from Ancient Egypt: Two Aramaic Letters from Jewish Women,” in *Israel in Egypt: The Land of Egypt as Concept and Reality for Jews in Antiquity and the Early Medieval Period*, ed. Alison Salvesen, Sarah Pearce, and Miriam Frenkel, AJEC 110 (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 399–400.

49. It seems to me that *pistis* here is a legal and not a moral notion, as suggested in Roger S. Bagnall and Raffaella Cribiore, *Women’s Letters from Ancient Egypt, 300 BC–AD 800*, with contributions by Evie Ahtaridis (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 291 (“that you have become faithless”) and Arzt-Grabner, “Zum alltagssprachlichen Hintergrund von Πίστις,” 248 (“dass du deine Glaubwürdigkeit verloren [wörtlich: geändert] hast”). In the first sentence of her letter, Johanna uses a composite of the verb ἀλλᾶσαι *allassein* to blame Epagathos for “changing [ὑπαλλάξας *hypallaxas*] and going back on” his agreement.

50. On this and many epistolary examples, see Thomas Bauer, *Paulus und die kaiserzeitliche Epistolographie: Kontextualisierung und Analyse der Briefe an Philemon und an die Galater*, WUNT 276 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 223–24.

of debt collection]. If you find someone trustworthy [*piston*] [ . . . ] send the interest and the principal” (SB 14.12172, lines 18–28).<sup>51</sup> The less technical use of the *pistis* word family in the final example is illustrative for NT instances that accentuate the value of *pistis* as an individual and virtuous character trait.

### 3.2 *Pistis* as Character Trait and Virtue

*Pistis* is the attitude that is expected, commended, and valued not only in legal and business matters but also in all kinds of social relations. Documentary papyri offer a wide array of examples that underscore the *pistis* of an individual, such as a slave, a business partner, or a superior.

In a petition addressed to King Ptolemy and Queen Cleopatra, a certain Harendotes complains against his landlord, Herakleides, for breaking his word and for turning Horion, chief of police of Oxyrhyncha, into an accomplice (P.Erasm. 1.1; Oxyrhyncha [Arsinoites]; 148–147 BCE).<sup>52</sup> Harendotes protests, “I had already given him the rents in the winter, but Herakleides, arriving and despising trustworthiness that exists among human beings [ἀθετήσας τὴν ἐν ἀνθρώποις ὑπάρχουσαν πίστιν *athetēsas tēn en anthrōpois hyparchousan pistin*], and . . . taking as his accomplice Horion, the *archiphylakitēs* from Oxyrhyncha, they hindered me from taking away (the produce) which they had previously agreed that I could (take)” (P.Erasm. 1.1, lines 15–20). The situation becomes even more complicated when the same men try to obtain the rents from Harendotes a second time. Two aspects are of relevance: First, Harendotes’s generalizing statement that *pistis* is an attitude that adheres among human beings and whose absence is lamentable and disrupts relationships dependent on trust. Second, the author of 1 Timothy uses the same wording when he urges that younger widows should be excluded from the list of supported widows: “When their sensual desires overcome their dedication to Christ, they want to marry. Thus they bring judgment on themselves, because they have broken their first pledge [τὴν πρώτην πίστιν ἠθέτησαν *tēn prōtēn pistin ethetēsan*]” (1 Tim 5:11–12).<sup>53</sup> We cannot address all the riddles with which these verses are fraught, but we will instead comment briefly on *pistis*. Against the backdrop of the use of *pistis* in P.Erasm. 1.1 and the opposite idea in 2 Timothy 4:7 (“I have kept the faith”) paralleled in inscriptions (see above), it seems apparent that the author does not wish to say that “they apostatise from the faith.”<sup>54</sup> Rather, these younger widows reject or despise their first pledge or vow toward Christ, which they would have taken when they were enrolled as “real widows.”<sup>55</sup>

The famous Zenon Archive preserves a letter by an unknown author who addresses Zenon, thanking him that he has acted on his behalf, by virtue of which he is in good graces of a certain Nikanor (P.Col. 4.64; Philadelphia, Arsinoite Nome; 257–255 BCE [?]).<sup>56</sup> The writer proudly declares that “he (Nikanor) has admitted me to full confidence [πᾶσαν πίστιν *pasan pistin*], having conformed to my own attitude (in this respect). I think that he, too, will continue (in this attitude?) toward me.” It is likely that the letter announces the beginning of a patron-client relationship between the writer and Nikanor, using the phrase “full” or “complete *pistis*” to qualify the character of this (asymmetrical)

51. “SB.14.12172,” Papyri.info, <http://papyri.info/ddbdp/sb;14;12172>.

52. “P.Erasm. 1.1,” Papyri.info, <https://papyri.info/ddbdp/p.erasm;1;1>.

53. See James G. Keenan, “Inheritance and Wills,” in the present volume (ch. 17).

54. I. Howard Marshall (in collaboration with Philip H. Towner), *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 600.

55. See, apart from the commentaries, the discussion in Mutschler, *Glaube*, 329–32.

56. “P.Col.4.64,” Papyri.info, <https://papyri.info/ddbdp/p.col;4;64>.

bond.<sup>57</sup> A parallel expression in the letter to Titus instructs the addressee to teach slaves “to show that they can be fully trusted [πάσαν πίστιν . . . ἀγαθὴν *pasan pistin . . . agathēn*], so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive” (Titus 2:10). Again, the meaning of the instruction, in which the two adjectives “complete/full” and “good,” respectively, qualify the scope of this demonstration of faithfulness, is not easy to determine, as the phrase could either call for “full and good reliability/faithfulness” or for “full reliability/faithfulness with respect to what is good.” The explanatory value of the parallel expression in P.Col. 4.64 and Titus 2:10 should not be overstated,<sup>58</sup> yet both cases highlight the ethical significance and commendable character of complete *pistis* in social relationships, not only for the two partners in *pistis* but also for their immediate social context. Several other papyri express the social expectation and obligation of slaves and other subordinates, such as letter carriers and messengers, that they should be qualified by “reliability” (*pistis*) or by being “reliable” (*pistos*). When a certain Sabinus, son of the landowner and former legionary Gemellus, writes to the administrator Epagathus around 100 CE (P.Fay. 122; Euhemeria [Arsinoite nome]), he asks him to send—probably a letter—to Chalothis, “if you find someone among those who are present who has much reliability” (ἔχοντα πείστιν [l. πίστιν] πολλήν *echonta peistin pollēn*) (P.Fay. 122, lines 21–22).<sup>59</sup>

### 3.3 Pisteuein as Trust

In another document preserved from the Zenon Archive, a certain Patumis confides in Zenon that he would help him in a quarrel concerning livestock (P.Ryl. 4.569; 3rd c. BCE; Philadelphia, Arsinoite Nome): “You protected us in the beginning, and now again no one but you will protect us, for the sake of Isis. For I would not have put trust in anyone but you [οὐδενὶ γὰρ ἂν ἐπίστευσα ἀλλ’ ἢ σοὶ *oudenī gar an episteusa all’ ē soi*] to protect us.”<sup>60</sup>

An illustrative and also quite entertaining example of intrafamilial tensions concerning trust is the letter to a certain Kopres (*SB* 3.6264; end of 2nd c.; location unknown). The sender is probably Kopres’s mother; she complains about her daughter-in-law, his wife, and warns him that he is twisted around her little finger in relation to monetary donations: “I know your quick temper, but your wife inflames you when she says every hour that I do not give you anything. When you came up, I gave you small coins because I received some grain; but this month I could not find (anything) to give you. I am keeping nothing back from you because I trust you in everything. Your wife says in fact, ‘She does not trust you’ [πάντα σοὶ γὰρ | πιστεύω, ἢ γὰρ | γυνή σου λέγει (l. λέγει), ὅτι | οὐδὲν πιστεύῃ (l. πιστεύει) *panta soi gar pisteuō, he gar gynē sou legi, hoti ouden pisteuē*]” (*SB* 3.6264, lines 3–20).<sup>61</sup>

57. Cf. Christopher J. Cornthwaite, “My Lord and Protector: Papyri and *Skepē* Patronage in Sirach and 3 Maccabees,” in *Scribes and Their Remains*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Jeremiah J. Johnston, LSTS 94 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2020), 125: “this is the creation of a *skepē* [patronage].”

58. Another parallel is found in *SB* 16.12504, line 10 (Ptolemais Euergetis [Arsinoites]; after Aug. 24, 136 CE) (“SB.16.12504,” Papyri.info, <https://papyri.info/ddbdp/sb;16;12504>), which requires from those who supervise the collection of beer-tax that they do so “with all good-faith and care” (μετὰ πάσης πίστεως καὶ ἐπιμελείας *meta pasēs pisteōs kai epimeleias*). See text, translation, and discussion in Llewelyn, *New Docs* 8, 62–69.

59. “P.Fay.122,” Papyri.info, <https://papyri.info/ddbdp/p.fay;122>. On the Gemellus/Sabinus/Epagathus papyri as a whole, see Rodney Ast and Giuseppina Azzarello, “A Roman Veteran and His Skilful Administrator: Gemellus and Epagathus in Light of Unpublished Papyri,” in *Actes du 26e Congrès international de papyrologie*, ed. Paul Schubert, Recherches et Rencontres 30 (Geneva: Droz, 2012), 67–71.

60. “P.Ryl.4.569,” Papyri.info, <http://papyri.info/ddbdp/p.ryl;4;569>.

61. “Sb.3.6264,” Papyri.info, <http://papyri.info/ddbdp/sb;3;6264>. Translation and comments in Bagnall and Cribiore, *Women’s Letters*, 282.

In the identity discourse of early Christians, the notion of trust in God and Jesus became a central marker, often expressed by the phrase *pisteuein* plus an object in the dative case (see, e.g., John 8:31). In Paul, Abraham is presented as the typological progenitor of Christ followers. In both Romans and Galatians, though with different emphases, Genesis 15:6 serves as his primary reference text: “Abraham trusted in God” (ἐπίστευσεν δὲ Ἀβραὰμ τῷ θεῷ *episteusen de Abraam tō theō*, translating the Hebrew וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה אֲבְרָהָם לַיהוָה *webe’emin byhwh*; see Rom 4:3; Gal 3:6).<sup>62</sup> Abraham’s faith in the God “who gives life to the dead” (Rom 4:17) prefigures Christian faith in the God “who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead” (v. 24).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

In the Greco-Roman world, *pistis* (and Latin *fides*) play a most prominent role in all areas of human life and thinking—in rhetorical, philosophical, political, juridical, and socio-cultural contexts, and not least of all in the religious sphere. Loyalty and faithfulness were integral for Roman society and identity. The concept of *pistis/fides* is at the heart of the Roman state system and emotional economy; it is virtually omnipresent and characterizes almost all sorts of interpersonal and interstate relationships, as well as those with the gods.<sup>63</sup>

In Delphic manumission records, a slave entrusts (*pisteuein*) money to the god, who passes it on to the master for the slave to be freed; this legal play enacts a triangular, reciprocal relationship of trust. Many inscriptions preserve honorific decrees, which commend an individual benefactor for his *pistis*—that is, responsibility, loyalty, or fidelity. Sometimes *pistis* is part of a catena of virtues. In several instances, a person or a community is praised for maintaining loyalty, even in adverse circumstances. Faithfulness promises reward (e.g., privileges for a *polis*), lack of faithfulness is punished (e.g., by illness). A remarkable inscription from Epidauros chastises an “unbeliever” or “unfaithful” man for doubting the healing reports and associates the absence of *pistis* with guilt. No earlier source documents this connection between religious unbelief and punishment. It is hardly surprising that *pistis* was personified and even became divine; people revered the goddess Pistis (or Fides) in temples in Athens or Rome, and on a smaller scale, members of a religious association at Delos presented a statue of Pistis to the gods.

As regards the papyrological evidence, the first aspect to note is that, prior to Paul, no document is preserved that uses *pistis* or *pisteuein* in a religious sense. By contrast, the range of usages in legal contexts is wide, and *pistis* denotes all kinds of bonds that connect two or more parties (e.g., oath, safe conduct, credit, guarantee for a credit, relationship of trust, pledge). In a business transaction, the dative πίστει *pistei* simply means “in good faith” (*bona fide*). Everyday social relationships between individuals who differ in status, power, or resources should ideally be characterized by mutual *pistis*: it is a matter of trust that a superior acts for the sake of his subordinates, and conversely that a subordinate is

62. It was, among other things, this very difference between the Greek and Hebrew wording that triggered an intense debate, set off with Martin Buber’s claim that Christian *pistis*, represented by Paul, is intellectualized and influenced by Greek thinking (*credere deo*), whereas the Hebrew *emunah*, represented by Jesus, implies trust in God within the historical experiences of God’s people (*credere in deum*). For Buber, the result of the translation process of Gen 15:6 is emblematic of a major theological shift. See Martin Buber, *Two Types of Faith*, trans. Norman P. Goldhawk (London: Routledge, 1951).

63. Cf. Carl Becker, “Fides,” *RAC* 7:801. Morgan explored the role of “faith” in relation to oneself (*Roman Faith*, 39–45), to family members and lovers (45–51), in friendship (55–60), and in public life (60–74), as well as in military matters (77–85), politics (85–95), interstate relations (95–104), economics (105–8) and in the legal system (108–16).

trustworthy and reliable. Problems arise when the bond of trust cracks and the partners prove unreliable.

Overall, the semantic breadth and variability of the *pistis* lexicon is demonstrated by its wealth of usage documented not only in literary sources but also in inscriptions and papyri. Early Christian conceptions of faith are embedded in the political, social, and cultural milieus of the time. So far, NT research on *pistis* has not given adequate weight to documentary sources, thus overlooking some illuminating contexts in which the word group was used.<sup>64</sup>

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