

What Can We Say about Phoebe?

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The conclusion of Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome includes his most extensive catalog of coworkers. In addition to Paul himself, the chapter mentions thirty-seven specific individuals, ten of them women. At the head of this list stands Phoebe:

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae, so that you may welcome her in the Lord as is fitting for the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well. (Rom 16:1–2 NRSV)

No other page of the Bible mentions Phoebe, leaving us little to go on. What, then, can we say about Phoebe?

We know, of course, her name, which means “bright,” “radiant,” or “pure.”¹ Though the name Phoebe occurs only here in the New Testament, it was not uncommon in the Greco-Roman world. We also know she was from Cenchreae, situated approximately five miles southeast of its larger neighbor, Corinth. Cenchreae was Corinth's port on the eastern coast of the Isthmus of Corinth, giving access via the Saronic Gulf and the Aegean Sea to Macedonia, Asia Minor, Syria, and Egypt. It seems likely she was a Gentile, for another Phoebe was one of the twelve Titans of Greek mythology and became grandmother of the twins Apollo and Artemis. Moving beyond these basics, the remainder of our knowledge about Phoebe can be organized under four titles—patron, deacon, preacher, and apostle.

Phoebe the patron

The first of four titles we can attribute to Phoebe is patron. One of the imbedded social and economic realities of the Greco-Roman world was the symbiotic system of patronage. Society was a complex web of patrons and clients. Patrons were benefactors of the arts and of various organizations. Patrons also recruited individual clients. Patrons courted clients, opening social opportunities to those below them. In return, clients sang the praises of their patrons; that is, clients “patronized” them and thereby increased the honor of those above them. The accumulation of clients could bring significant honor; thus, it is important to note that Paul not only calls Phoebe a patron, but a “patron of many.”²

Paul's word in Romans 16:2 is *prostatis*, which has been variously translated as “succourer” (KJV), “leader,” “legal counsel,” “benefactor” (NAB, NRSV, NIV 2011), “good friend” (NEB), “patron” (ESV), “overseer,”³ and, most frequently, as the generic word “helper” (ASV, NASB, RSV, NKJV, NLT, cf. NJB and NIV 1984). Such an understated translation as “helper” is unfortunate, however, for *prostatis* is a technical term.



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The masculine form *prostates* and its Latin equivalent *patronus* regularly receive the translation “patron,” and we should wonder why translators and commentators have been reluctant to recognize this sense in the feminine form. James Dunn, for example, has expressed concern: “The unwillingness of commentators to give *prostatis* its most natural and obvious sense of ‘patron’ is most striking.”⁴

Indeed, literary and archaeological evidence offers glimpses of the work of women patrons.⁵ Consider Phile of Priene in southwest Asia Minor, who in the first century BC “constructed at her own expense the reservoir for water and the city aqueduct.”⁶ In the early second century AD, Plancia Magna was benefactress of the immense and ornate gates of Perge, the leading city of Pamphylia.⁷ At the close of the third century AD, Aurelia Leite provided for the restoration of a gymnasium on the Aegean island of Paros.⁸ The case of Junia Theodora is particularly relevant, for she lived in mid-first-century Corinth—the same era and area as Phoebe. Five documents, preserved in a composite inscription, honor Junia Theodora for her leadership in patronage (*prostasia*).⁹ Mentioned more than once is her hospitality, and we should suspect that Phoebe also showed hospitality to Christians passing through her port city. On a smaller scale, a mosaic in the floor of a prayer room dating to about AD 230 preserves the memory of a woman named Akeptous and the table she donated: “The God-loving Akeptous has offered this table to God Jesus Christ as a memorial.” An adjacent mosaic calls the reader to remember four other Christian women, Primilla, Cyriaca, Dorthea, and Chreste.¹⁰

Though patronage was ubiquitous in the Greco-Roman world, the actual Greek and Latin terms “patron” and “client” are rare, for, “by the time of the early empire this language was generally considered too abrasive to the delicate honor system.”¹¹ Nevertheless, Phoebe is not the only woman described by one of these classic terms. The terms describe high-profile women such as Domitia Lucilla, mother of Marcus Aurelius, and her client Cratia; Livia, wife of Augustus Caesar; Agrippina and Domitia, Nero's mother and aunt.¹² These terms also describe lesser-known women. The epitaph of Manlia Gnome, for example, speaks of her “many clients” (*clientes multos*). A certain Claudia is called “best patroness” (*patrona optima*) by her husband.¹³ Finally, in some cases, a mother governs her son's finances as patron.¹⁴

Phoebe the deacon

In addition to her status as patron, we rightly call Phoebe deacon. Paul himself does so in Romans 16:1, calling her a “*diakonos* of the congregation in Cenchreae.”

A common rejoinder, of course, is that Phoebe was simply a servant, not a deacon.¹⁵ Or, as it is frequently phrased, she filled the role of servant, but did not hold the office of deacon. Fatal to this rejoinder, however, is a detail from the text itself. Phoebe's description as *diakonos* includes the qualifying phrase, “of the congregation in Cenchreae.” This localization of Phoebe's position strongly suggests Paul had in mind a specific status rather

than general comportment.¹⁶ Moving beyond the text, the argument that Phoebe was merely a generic servant quickly collapses under the weight of closer inspection.

This inspection reveals that the debate over whether Phoebe held the office of deacon is too dependent on our modern situation. Consider, for example, the word “minister,” a perfectly legitimate translation of *diakonos* which rightly has been used to describe Phoebe.¹⁷ Indeed, Paul describes Timothy as *diakonos* in 1 Timothy 4:6 in a phrase often translated with the word “minister” (e.g., KJV, RSV, NIV 1984, NIV 2011). Elsewhere, English translations routinely render *diakonos* as “minister” in reference to Epaphras and to Paul himself (Eph 3:7; Col 1:7, 23, 25). The claim that Phoebe was a minister often meets resistance, which arises not because of the meaning of the ancient Greek word *diakonos*, but because of the connotations of the modern English word “minister.” The debate is sabotaged by the fact that “minister” does not mean in the twenty-first century what “minister” meant in first-century Cenchreae. Similarly, if a Southern Baptist and a Roman Catholic were deliberating whether Phoebe held the office of deacon, they would each be pondering a different question.

Further confusion results when interpreters defend Phoebe’s status as deacon by pointing out that the word *diakonos* is masculine in grammatical gender. Such a claim is imprecise. While most Greek nouns have only one gender, *diakonos* is among that small cluster of nouns with common gender. That is, they can change gender based on context.¹⁸ Simply put, *diakonos* in Romans 16:1 is indeed feminine in spite of its inflected ending, and we can infer nothing of substance from the gender of the word.

Our inspection should not ignore that there were indeed women deacons in the early church. Pliny the Younger, governor of Bithynia, wrote to the emperor Trajan in approximately AD 110 that he had tortured two *ministrae* to determine whether Christians should be considered seditious.¹⁹ Often overlooked is that Pliny does not speak of two women “who are *ministrae*”; he speaks, rather, of two women “whom they call *ministrae*” (*quae ministrae dicebantur*).²⁰ Pliny reveals a designation regularly given to these women by other Christians; thus, he clearly reports an actual title. Other sources that testify to the ministry of women deacons in the early church include Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–215), Origen (c. 185–254), “The Ecclesiastical Canons of the Apostles” (c. 250), “The Teaching of the Apostles” (c. 250), the Council of Nicaea (325), Epiphanius of Salamis (315–403), Basil of Caesarea (329–379), Gregory of Nyssa (335–394), John Chrysostom (344–407), and “The Apostolic Constitutions” (c. 380).²¹

Finally, inspecting the use of *diakonos* in the New Testament reveals an inconsistency in the way we treat texts. As noted above, some modern interpreters claim Phoebe was a generic servant rather than an actual deacon, and this claim has not been thwarted by the undisputed presence of *diakonos* in Romans 16:1. We do not, however, find the noun *diakonos* in the calling of Stephen, Philip, and the other five “deacons” of Acts 6. Phoebe is called *diakonos*; these seven are not. Phoebe is associated with a particular congregation; the seven are not. The seven are chosen in response to a specific, identifiable, temporary need; Phoebe is not. The seven are called before the office of deacon is established in the churches; Phoebe is not (see Phil 1:1). Surely, if we

can claim with confidence that anyone in the New Testament fills the role of servant without holding the title of deacon, it is these seven servants of Acts 6.

Phoebe the preacher

In addition to patron and deacon, Phoebe can also be called preacher. This title arises from her role as carrier of Paul’s letter to the Romans. Scholarly consensus affirms that Phoebe is indeed among Paul’s letter carriers.²² This consensus is not limited to modern scholars. Martin Luther, for example, plainly states, “This letter was sent through Phoebe.”²³ Centuries earlier, a ninth-century majuscule manuscript mentions Phoebe the letter carrier in its subscription to Romans, as do nearly all subsequent manuscripts.²⁴ Still earlier, Pseudo-Constantius’s early-fifth-century commentary on Romans states:

Here the apostle demonstrates that no discrimination or preference between male and female is to be tolerated, because he sends his letter to Rome by the hand of a woman and sends greetings to other women in the same epistle.²⁵

Paul’s commending of Phoebe toward the end of his letter is a letter-writing convention. Harry Gamble offers examples of this convention from papyri, Cicero, Polycarp, and 1 Clement.²⁶ Paul himself uses no set formula to identify his letter carriers.²⁷ One can discern, however, that they may include Timothy (1 Cor 4:17), Titus (2 Cor 8:23, 12:18), Tychicus (Eph 6:21–22, Col 4:7–9 [perhaps Onesimus as well]), Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25–30), and Phoebe (Rom 16:1–2).

Phoebe’s role as deliverer of Paul’s letter to the Romans can be described in five stages. First, she was chosen. Because the Roman mail system was typically reserved for government correspondence, Paul and other letter writers were regularly in need of letter carriers. A carrier might be chosen because he or she was already planning to travel in the desired direction. Furthermore, many letters were composed precisely because a traveler was setting out in the right direction.²⁸ Phoebe’s record of service and generosity as patron and deacon earned Paul’s respect and trust and made her a candidate for the important task of delivering his letter to the Christians of Rome. Moreover, she presumably possessed other characteristics that influenced Paul’s choice, such as dependability, education, and, as we will see shortly, rhetorical skill. Perhaps she was bold like Paul; perhaps her tact balanced Paul’s boldness. In any case, Paul chose her.

Second, Phoebe would have undergone preparation for the task. She may have received advice from one of Paul’s other letter carriers or envoys; after all, Timothy was among Paul’s companions when he wrote to the Romans (Rom 16:21). Paul’s envoys, whether or not they brought a letter, were surrogates for Paul himself; thus, he certainly made his aims clear to Phoebe, including elucidating for her such a lengthy and substantive letter.²⁹ He may have advised her about handling certain questions. In all probability, she was present as Paul directed his amanuensis Tertius (Rom 16:22). As is common when delivering an important message of considerable length, especially in the oral performance style described below, Phoebe likely rehearsed her presentation. Finally, we can envision Phoebe being sent off with prayer.

The third stage was the journey itself.³⁰ Phoebe may have walked north to the Egnatian Way then west to the Adriatic coast, where she would have crossed to Italy at the narrow point of the Adriatic and walked the Appian Way from Brundisium to Rome. While the precise duration of this trek is impossible to know, six to eight weeks is not an unreasonable speculation.³¹ Given the great length (approximately eight hundred miles) of such a foot journey, however, a sea voyage seems more likely. On a westward course, beginning in the Gulf of Corinth, with no intervening stops, a ship could travel from Corinth to Rome in less than two weeks.

Fourth, the heart of Phoebe's task was to present the letter to the house churches of Rome. The delivery of a letter addressed to a group would typically involve reading the letter aloud to the gathered recipients, of whom many would have been illiterate.³² This reading has been described as "oral performance" because it summoned the rhetorical skills of the reader: skills such as voice inflection, facial expression, and gesticulation. Moreover, a well-prepared reader served also as interpreter of the letter, with authority to speak for the author in order to communicate with clarity both the letter's content and the author's tone.³³ Oral performance was often the task of the letter deliverer, who may have been chosen precisely for this reason. Indeed, Paul's custom was to assign this task to the carrier, as M. Luther Stirewalt concludes, "Thus the problem of the post was solved for Paul by the service of people who supported him and shared his ministry."³⁴ This oral performance has roots in both of Paul's overlapping literary settings, Jewish and Greco-Roman. Martin Jaffee addresses the Jewish context:

Texts in manuscript were routinely shared in oral-performative settings. "Reading" was primarily a social activity in which a declaimer delivered the written text to its audience. In such settings, the oral-performative tradition included not only the recitation of the written text, but also the inflections of voice, gesture, and interpretive amplification through which the performer gave audible life to the script. In the culture of Second Temple Jewish scribal groups, oral-performative tradition was a common medium for sharing written texts.³⁵

Similarly, Stirewalt describes the Greco-Roman setting:

[Paul's] missives were carried by a responsible party who became the surrogate—the personal representative—of the sender. . . . In the secular realm the carrier was an envoy who was informed and responsible for interpretation, expected to speak for and report back to the sender. Enough evidence has been gleaned from Paul's letters to conclude that he arranged similar assignments to complete the letter-event. The service of a personal surrogate was of special significance for Paul. . . .

Such personal aspects [inflection, tone, gestures, emotional behavior] the reader supplied, and Paul was certainly conscious of the shift in personnel required for the oral delivery of his message. He must have known that presenters would inevitably color the message with their own personal aspects and speech habits. Separated from the people, confronted by the necessary temporal delays, Paul depended on a third party

to complete and update communications and to return messages from the correspondents—to expand and interpret his written word, and to translate his thought and intention when the messages were presented orally before an assembly.³⁶

In addition to the oral performance itself, this fourth stage of the process would involve locating the house churches and waiting for the members to gather or for congregations to cooperate and form larger gatherings. The logistics of such gatherings, together with the cultural emphasis on hospitality,³⁷ would prevent Phoebe from arriving at and departing from any one house church on the same day. Additional time may also have been required for making a copy of the letter, including securing a scribe to do so. How many congregations dotted the city of Rome is unknown,³⁸ but this central stage of Phoebe's task likely lasted several days, perhaps several weeks.

The fifth and final stage of Phoebe's task as letter carrier was to return to Paul with a report.³⁹ In this case, she would inform him of the details of the journey and especially the responses of the congregations. Indeed, she may have brought back one or more letters to Paul and his companions.

In the modern church, we have a title for a person who stands before a gathered congregation and with rhetorical skill delivers a prepared message based on Scripture. That title is preacher.

Phoebe the apostle

Phoebe's fourth and final title is suggestive, not definitive. This suggestion begins with another woman, Junia. The Junia debate is over—at least it should be. Scholarship has weighed in, and a consensus is emerging.⁴⁰ The woman Junia was indeed "prominent among the apostles," as Paul says in his greetings to the Christians of Rome. She has won her gender back, and "Junias" must return to his birthplace: the biased imaginations of Bible translators and commentators.

The Junia debate has centered on two questions. First, what is the grammatical gender of the name *Iounian* (given here without accent in the accusative case as it occurs in Rom 16:7)? Regarding this first question, Bernadette Brooten led the charge in 1977 and Eldon Epp delivered the *coup de grâce* in 2002; together, they have obliterated the oft-stated assertion that *Iounian* is a shortened form of the masculine Latin name *Iunianus*.⁴¹ The second question in the Junia debate concerns not the name itself, but a phrase describing the name. Specifically, does Romans 16:7 describe Andronicus and Junia as "well known to the apostles" (NET, ESV) or "prominent among the apostles" (NRSV, cf. KJV, RSV, NASB, NIV 1984, TNIV, NIV 2011)? Indeed, some have mounted a defense of the former. Epp, however, casts doubt on the validity of this defense, and Linda Belleville has decimated such efforts, in part by revealing mishandling of data.⁴²

Accepting Belleville's confident claim that "virtually all scholars" concede Junia was a woman,⁴³ a cluster of questions naturally arises. Should we think of apostles as essentially all male and of Junia as a lone anomaly? Or should we assume the existence of other unmentioned women apostles? To form a foundation for considering these questions, we must first grasp the New Testament concept of apostle.

“Apostle” in the New Testament

“Apostle” derives from the Greek noun *apostolos* and the cognate verb *apostellō* (send, dispatch). The verb typically means to send a message or to send a person with a task or message; it occurs in the New Testament more than two hundred times in diverse contexts. The noun has varied meanings related to sending in more ancient Greek, but, in the New Testament, it predominantly refers to Christians sent out with the message of the gospel and charged to proclaim that message with the authority of the person or persons who sent them.

In the Synoptics and Acts, “the Apostles” is identical to “the Twelve”; the Apocalypse echoes this identity.⁴⁴ In Paul’s letters, however, it quickly becomes clear that *apostolos* describes persons beyond the Twelve. This title is a frequent self-designation for Paul, found along with his name in the opening verse of nine New Testament letters.⁴⁵ Paul recognizes the apostleship of Peter (Gal 1:18, 2:8) and others of the Twelve (1 Cor 9:5, 15:7; Gal 1:17, 2:9). He goes beyond the Twelve, however, and calls James the brother of Jesus an apostle (Gal 1:19; cf. 1 Cor 15:7; Gal 2:9). Paul speaks more than once of a plurality of apostles beyond the Twelve. Early in his ministry, he calls himself and his companions apostles, using the first-person plural to include Silvanus and Timothy (1 Thess 1:1; Acts 17:4, 10, 14): “nor did we seek praise from mortals, whether from you or from others, though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ” (1 Thess 2:6–7a NRSV). Paul’s later use of “us” in 1 Corinthians 4:9—“God has exhibited us apostles”—probably encompasses those coworkers mentioned in the letter, namely Timothy (1 Cor 16:10), Apollos (1 Cor 4:6, 16:12), and his coauthor Sosthenes (1 Cor 1:1). Timothy (2 Cor 1:1) and perhaps Titus (2 Cor 8:16, 23) are later identified as “apostles of the churches” (2 Cor 8:23). Elsewhere, Paul calls Epaphroditus “your apostle” (Phil 2:25).⁴⁶ Beyond Paul’s own writings, Acts 14:14 calls Paul and Barnabas apostles.

What does Paul mean by the term “apostle”? When he exhorts the Corinthian Christians to distinguish between true and false apostles, he is not talking about the Twelve (2 Cor 11:5, 13; 12:11, 12). When Paul appeals to verifying “signs, wonders, and powerful deeds,” which are “the signs of an apostle” (2 Cor 12:12), he is not describing the verification of messengers in general. When Paul positions “apostles” at the head of the enumerated list of gifts God has placed in the church (1 Cor 12:28, cf. Eph 4:11), he speaks neither of the Twelve nor of messengers in general. For Paul, therefore, an apostle is someone gifted by God to proclaim the gospel, sent out with the blessing of the church to do so with a high level of authority, and sometimes verified by miraculous signs.

Women apostles in the early church

Christian writers of the early church and into the early Middle Ages did not reserve the title *apostolos* for the Twelve alone, but “maintained a broader concept of apostolicity.”⁴⁷ To note briefly that women were included in this “broader concept of apostolicity” will be helpful. Female apostles in early Christianity were admittedly few; male apostles, however, were also not numerous.

Early Christian leaders speak freely of Junia as an apostle. At least sixteen ancient authors, from Origen (c. 185–254) to Peter Lombard (c. 1095–1169), understand Romans 16:7 to refer to a woman.⁴⁸ Consider the well-known commendation by Chrysostom (c. 347–407):

“Greet Andronicus and Junia . . . who are outstanding among the apostles”: To be an apostle is something great. But to be

Who received this apostleship? Who was the “we” in this clause? To be more suggestive, is it likely that Phoebe did not include herself when she herself said “we”?

outstanding among the apostles—just think what a wonderful song of praise that is! They were outstanding on the basis of their works and virtuous actions. Indeed, how great the wisdom of this woman must have been that she was even deemed worthy of the title of apostle.⁴⁹

Other New Testament women are also called apostles in the early church, though they are not so named in Scripture. Origen refers to the Woman at the Well as an apostle who preached to her fellow Samaritans. Hippolytus of Rome (d. 235/6) speaks of Mary Magdalene and her companions at the empty tomb as apostles.⁵⁰

Moving beyond the women of Scripture, the second-century *Acts of Paul* relays the exploits of Thecla, a devoted disciple of Paul who became a teacher of many. The fifth-century hagiographical text, “The Acts of the Holy Apostle and Martyr of Christ, Thecla,” repeatedly speaks of Thecla the *apostolos*.⁵¹ Other hagiographical traditions speak of Nino, an early fourth-century woman who “taught,” “preached,” “converted,” “baptized,” and held the titles “evangelist” and “apostle.”⁵² Thus, the point is made that some ancient Christian writers considered Paul’s statement that “God has appointed in the church first apostles . . .” (1 Cor 12:28 NRSV) to be a gender-inclusive claim.

Was Phoebe an apostle?

Having surveyed Paul’s use of the title *apostolos*, we return to Phoebe. Clearly, she was sent out with a message and the blessing of Paul and his entourage to proclaim it. Should we, therefore, think of her as an apostle?

The heart of Phoebe’s mission to Rome was her repeated oral performance of Paul’s letter. Each time she made such a presentation, her opening comments included reference to “Jesus Christ our Lord . . . through whom *we* received grace and apostleship” (Rom 1:5, italics added).⁵³ Who received this apostleship? Who was the “we” in this clause? To be more suggestive, is it likely that Phoebe did not include herself when she herself said “we”?

Certainly, Paul’s “we” refers to himself and some subgroup of his coworkers.⁵⁴ One naturally looks to the beginning of the letter in search of coauthors to justify this plural language. Curiously, however, Romans is among Paul’s few letters with no named co-author.⁵⁵ Paul does mention companions in his closing greetings. In Romans 16:23, he sends greetings from Gaius (host of a house church), Erastus (the city treasurer), and Quartus (described simply as “the brother”). In all likelihood, these three men (especially Erastus and Quartus) were simply Corinthians with acquaintances in Rome, and Paul’s “we” refers instead to individuals more closely associated with Paul’s ministry. In Romans 16:21, Paul sends greetings from Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater, whom he

describes as “my relatives.” In this same verse, Timothy is claimed as “my coworker” and heads the list of those who send greetings.

Timothy, therefore, is likely included in the “we” of Romans 1:5. He is among Paul’s most constant companions, and he alone is called “coworker” among those sending greetings. Paul’s other frequent companions—such as Silvanus, Titus, Tychicus—are not mentioned in Romans. Prisca and Aquila are mentioned, but they are on the receiving end in Rome and are greeted in the letter, together with the church meeting in their house (Rom 16:3–5).

This Roman audience was largely unacquainted with Paul and would wonder, as do we, who was included in this “we” which Phoebe uttered. Paul entrusted Phoebe with the oral performance of this letter, his *magnum opus*, and it is her lips that repeatedly spoke this apostolic “we.” Surely, therefore, it is reasonable to wonder, “Was Phoebe an apostle?” To answer “no” is to claim that, while we do not know whom the “we” did include, we do know whom it did not include—it did not include the very person who spoke it!

Conclusion

At first glance, it seems we must be content to know little about Phoebe beyond her name. A closer look, however, offers insights into her several roles. As a patron, she enjoyed respectable social standing because of the benevolence and other forms of help she offered to many, including to Paul himself. As a deacon, she was a servant leader in the congregation of Cenchreae; Paul viewed this position highly and expected the same of his hearers. Phoebe presented Paul’s message to the gathered Christians of Rome with rhetorical skill, and she can therefore be called preacher. Finally, while many details surrounding the suggestion that Phoebe was an apostle are unclear, this much is clear: The original hearers did not rule out the apostleship of Phoebe on the basis of her sex, for Junia herself, who was indeed “outstanding among the apostles,” lived and worshipped among the Christians of Rome.

Notes

1. H. G. Liddell, R. Scott, and H. S. Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th ed. (hereafter LSJ) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), s.v. *phoibos*.
2. On patronage, see John K. Chow, *Patronage and Power: A Study of Social Networks in Corinth*, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* Supplement 75 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1992); Frederick W. Danker, *Benefactor: Epigraphic Study of a Graeco-Roman and New Testament Semantic Field* (St. Louis, MO: Clayton, 1982); Esther Yue L. Ng, “Phoebe as *Prostatis*,” *Trinity Journal* NS 25, no. 1 (2004): 3–13; Carolyn Osiek and Margaret Y. MacDonald, *A Woman’s Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2005), 194–219; Richard P. Saller, *Patronage in the Early Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).
3. Helen Barrett Montgomery, *The New Testament in Modern English* (Philadelphia, PA: Judson, 1924).
4. James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, *Word Biblical Commentary* 38b (Dallas, TX: Word, 1988), 888.
5. See also Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 888–89; Osiek and MacDonald, *Woman’s Place*, 199–209, 214–19; Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, vol. 2, *Paul and the Early Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 1435.
6. *Die Inschriften von Priene*, no. 208; Bruce W. Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows: The Appearance of New Women and the Pauline Communities* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 181.
7. *L’Année épigraphique* (1958): 78; (1965): 209; Winter, *Roman Wives*, 182.
8. *Inscriptiones graecae* 12.5.292; Winter, *Roman Wives*, 182.

9. Osiek and MacDonald, *Woman’s Place*, 205–07.
10. Vassilios Tzaferis, “Inscribed ‘To God Jesus Christ’: Early Christian Prayer Hall Found in Megiddo Prison,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 33, no. 2 (March/April 2007): 38–49.
11. Osiek and MacDonald, *Woman’s Place*, 196.
12. Osiek and MacDonald, *Woman’s Place*, 199–200.
13. Osiek and MacDonald, *Woman’s Place*, 202–03.
14. G. H. R. Horsley and S. Llewelyn, eds., *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity* (hereafter *NewDocs*) 4 (North Ryde, NSW, 1987), 243; *NewDocs* 6 (1992), 24.
15. For example, Jack Cottrell, *Romans*, 2 vols., College Press NIV Commentary (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1998), 2:461–64 (538–39 in the 2005 one-volume abridgement by Terry Chaney); Everett Ferguson, *Women in the Church* (Chickasha, OK: Yoemen, 2003), 9.
16. Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 411; Kazimierz Romaniuk, “Was Phoebe in Romans 16,1 a Deaconess?” *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche* NW 81 (1990): 133; James Walters, “Phoebe’ and ‘Junia(s)’—Rom. 16:1–2, 7,” in *Essays on Women in Earliest Christianity*, 2 vols. (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1993), 1:181–82.
17. For example, David L. Bartlett, *Romans*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 140; Gilbert Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles: What the Bible Says about a Woman’s Place in Church and Family*, 3d ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006), 250–51 n. 56; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1984), 170; Montgomery, *New Testament*, 434; Aída Besançon Spencer, *Beyond the Curse: Women Called to Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1985), 115.
18. F. W. Danker, W. Bauer, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (hereafter BDAG) (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1999), s.v.; LSJ, s.v.; *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, ed. J. P. Louw and E. A. Nida, 2d ed. (hereafter L&N), \$35.20, \$53.67. For a list, see Warren C. Trenchard, *Complete Vocabulary Guide to the Greek New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 296–97. On the development of the feminine *diakonissa* alongside the common *diakonos*, see Kevin Madigan and Carolyn Osiek, eds., *Ordained Women in the Early Church: A Documentary History* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 8.
19. Pliny the Younger, *Epistulae ad Trajanum* 10.96–97.
20. Andrea Lorenzo Molinari is among those who do note this distinction: “Women Martyrs in the Early Church: Hearing Another Side to the Story,” *Priscilla Papers* 22, no. 1 (Winter 2008): 7.
21. See Ute E. Eisen, *Women Officeholders in Early Christianity: Epigraphical and Literary Studies* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2000), 158–98; Madigan and Osiek, *Ordained Women*; John N. M. Wijngaards, *Women Deacons in the Early Church: Historical Texts and Contemporary Debates* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 2002), 145–88.
22. See, for example, F. F. Bruce, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans*, rev. ed., Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Leicester: InterVarsity, 1985), 252; Brendan Byrne, *Romans*, *Sacra pagina* 6 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1996), 446–47; Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 886, 889; Everett F. Harrison, “Romans,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976), 160; R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1936), 898; Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, *New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 913; Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 528; William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 5th ed., *International Critical Commentary* 32 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1902), 416.
23. Martin Luther, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, trans. J. Theodore Mueller (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1954), 206.
24. Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27th ed. (NA²⁷) (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993), 440. The ninth-century manuscript is Codex Angelicus (L 020).

25. Hermann Josef Frede, *Ein neuer Paulustext und Kommentar*, 2 vols., *Vetus Latina* 7, no. 8 (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1974), 2:91; Gerald Bray, ed., *Romans*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament 6 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 369.

26. Harry Gamble, Jr., *The Textual History of the Letter to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977) 81, 85–87.

27. One formula, “I am writing through,” uses a form of *graphō dia* or *scribo per*, and appears in the NT only in reference to Silvanus in 1 Pet 5:12. E. Randolph Richards, “Silvanus was not Peter’s Secretary: Theological Bias in Interpreting *dia Silouanou* . . . *egrapsa* in 1 Peter 5:12,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43 (2000): 417–32.

28. See further E. Randolph Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing: Secretaries, Composition and Collection* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 177–82, 204–05; John L. White, *Light from Ancient Letters*, Foundations and Facets (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1986), 214–17.

29. See further Margaret M. Mitchell, “New Testament Envoys in the Context of Greco-Roman Diplomatic and Epistolary Conventions: The Example of Timothy and Titus,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111 (1992): 641–62.

30. On travel, see further Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, “On the Road and On the Sea with St. Paul: Traveling Conditions in the First Century,” *Biblical Research* 1, no. 2 (Summer 1985): 38–47; David French, “Acts and the Roman Roads of Asia Minor,” in *The Book of Acts in its Graeco-Roman Setting*, ed. David W. J. Gill and Conrad Gempf; vol. 2 of *The Book of Acts in its First-Century Setting*, ed. Bruce W. Winter (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 49–58; Brian M. Rapske, “Acts, Travel, and Shipwreck,” in Gill, *Book of Acts*, 1–47; E. Randolph Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 189–99.

31. Foot travelers covered about twenty miles per day. Murphy-O’Connor, “Traveling Conditions,” 40; Rapske, “Acts,” 6.

32. “The likely range for the overall illiteracy level of the Roman Empire under the principate is almost certain to have been above 90%.” William V. Harris, “Graeco-Roman Literacy and Comparative Method,” *The History Teacher* 24, no. 1 (Nov 1990): 98. See also Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989); Leonard A. Curchin, “Literacy in the Roman Provinces: Qualitative and Quantitative Data from Central Spain,” *American Journal of Philology* 116 (1995): 461–76.

33. Pieter J. J. Botha, “The Verbal Art of the Pauline Letters: Rhetoric, Performance, and Presence,” in *Rhetoric and the New Testament: Essays from the 1992 Heidelberg Conference*, ed. Stanley Porter and Thomas Olbricht, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement* 90 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1993), 417–19; Stanley K. Stowers, “Social Typification and the Classification of Ancient Letters,” in *The Social World of Formative Christianity and Judaism in Tribute to Howard Clark Kee*, ed. Jacob Neusner, et al. (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1988), 79.

34. M. Luther Stirewalt Jr., *Paul, the Letter Writer* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 13.

35. Martin S. Jaffee, *Torah in the Mouth: Writing and Oral Tradition in Palestinian Judaism, 200 BCE–400 CE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 8.

36. Stirewalt, *Paul*, 23.

37. Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 192.

38. Peter Lampe, “The Roman Christians of Romans 16,” in *The Romans Debate*, 2d ed., ed. Karl P. Donfried (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 230, theorizes “at least eight” house churches in Rome.

39. Alternatively, Phoebe may have already intended to travel to Rome. In this case, she may have stayed in Rome longer, perhaps until Paul arrived there approximately two years later.

40. Peter Arzt, “Junia oder Iunias? Zum textkritischen Hintergrund von Röm 16,7,” in *Liebe zum Wort: Beiträge zur klassischen und biblischen Philologie*, ed. Friedrich V. Reiterer and Petrus Eder (Salzburg: Otto Müller, 1993), 83–102; Linda Belleville, “*Iounian* . . . *epīsemoi en tois apostólois*: A Re-examination of Romans 16.7 in light of Primary Source Materials,” *New Testament Studies* 51 (2005): 231–49; Bernadette Brooten, “Junia . . . Outstanding among the Apostles’ (Romans 16:7),” in *Women Priests: A Catholic Commentary on the Vatican Declaration*, ed. Arlene Swidler and Leonard Swidler (New York, NY: Paulist, 1977), 141–44; Richard Cervin, “A Note Regarding the Name ‘Junia(s)’ in Romans 16.7,” *New Testament Studies* 40 (1994): 464–70; Eldon J. Epp, “Text-Critical, Exegetical, and

Socio-Cultural Factors Affecting the Junia/Junias Variation in Romans 16,7,” in *New Testament Textual Criticism and Exegesis*, ed. Adelbert De-niaux, *Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologiarum lovaniensium* 161 (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 227–91, esp. 242–91; Valentín Fábrega, “War Junia(s), der hervorragende Apostel (Röm 16,7), eine Frau?” *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 27/28 (1984/85): 47–64; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, Anchor Bible 33 (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1993), 737–40; Lampe, “Roman Christians of Romans 16,” 227–28; John Thorley, “Junia, A Woman Apostle,” *Novum Testamentum* 38 (1996): 18–29.

41. Brooten, “Junia,” 141–44; Eldon J. Epp, *Junia: The First Woman Apostle* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 32–44; Epp, “Factors,” 251–63. The 2005 book is a revision of the 2002 article.

42. Michael Burer and Daniel B. Wallace, “Was Junia Really an Apostle? A Re-examination of Romans 16.7,” *New Testament Studies* 47 (2001): 76–91; contra Epp, “Factors,” 284–90; Belleville, “*Iounian*,” 242; Belleville, “Women Leaders in the Bible,” in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*, ed. Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 117–20. See also Richard Bauckham, *Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 165–80, Burer and Wallace accept that Junia was a woman, but deny she was an apostle. They are supported by Heath R. Curtis, “A Female Apostle?: A Note Re-examining the Work of Burer and Wallace Concerning *epīsemos* with *en* and the Dative,” *Concordia Journal* 28 (2002): 437–40.

43. Belleville, “*Iounian*,” 242.

44. See esp. Matt 10:2; Mark 3:14, 6:30; Luke 6:13, 9:10, 17:5, 22:14; Acts 1:2, 26; Rev 21:14. The fourth Gospel refers to “the Twelve,” but not to “apostles.”

45. Rom, 1 Cor, 2 Cor, Gal, Eph, Col, 1 Tim, 2 Tim, Titus; see also Rom 11:13; 1 Cor 9:1–2, 15:9; Gal 2:8; 1 Thess 2:6–7; 1 Tim 2:7; 2 Tim 1:11.

46. The presence of *humōn* (“your”) in Phil 2:25 and the fact that Epaphroditus was indeed sent to Philippi (probably as the letter carrier) make it plausible that *apostolos* here describes his task rather than his title (the verb in Phil 2:25, however, is *pempō* rather than *apostellō*).

47. Eisen, *Officeholders*, 50.

48. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 737–38, lists sixteen; Epp, “Factors,” 244, 251–52, supports Fitzmyer and argues against alleged exceptions.

49. *Commentarius in Epistolam ad Romanos* 31.2; translation by Brooten, “Junia,” 141.

50. Eisen, *Officeholders*, 50–51.

51. Eisen, *Officeholders*, 52; Gilbert Dagrón and Marie Dupré la Tour, *Vie et Miracles de saint Thècla: Texte Grec, Traduction et Commentaire* *Subsidia Hagiographica* 62 (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1978), 168, 170, 274.

52. Eisen, *Officeholders*, 52–54; David M. Lang, *Lives and Legends of the Georgian Saints, Selected and Translated from the Original Texts* (London: Allen & Unwin; New York, NY: Macmillan, 1956), 13–39.

53. Linking oral performance with Phoebe’s potential apostleship requires linking Romans 16 with Romans 1. Thus, the text-critical issue of Romans 16 arises. In summary, some scholars have theorized that Romans has existed in fourteen-, fifteen-, and sixteen-chapter forms. Gamble’s influential *Textual History of the Letter to the Romans* argues powerfully for the unity and originality of the sixteen-chapter version, concluding that, “the unity of the sixteen-chapter text and its Roman address are established” (127). This conclusion has gathered significant support. See, for example, Larry Hurtado, “The Doxology at the End of Romans,” in *New Testament Textual Criticism: Its Significance for Exegesis*, ed. Eldon J. Epp and Gordon D. Fee (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981), 188; see also the following contributors to Donfried, *Romans Debate*: Donfried himself (1xx, 52, 104), Wilhelm Wuellner (138–39), Peter Lampe (217–21), Peter Stuhlmacher (236), and James Dunn (245–47).

54. Against the theory that Paul uses the “plural of modesty” or “editorial plural,” see Samuel Byrskog, “Co-Senders, Co-Authors and Paul’s Use of the First Person Plural,” *Zietschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche* 87 (1996): 230–50; Paul Ellingworth, “‘We’ in Paul,” *The Bible Translator* 56 (2005): 227, 230–32. Alternately, Paul’s “we” may refer to all apostles, a theory which neither confirms nor denies Phoebe’s place in that group.

55. Ephesians and the Pastorals also claim no coauthor.