

STIGMA: TATTOOING AND BRANDING IN GRAECO-ROMAN ANTIQUITY*

By C. P. JONES

I. THE PROBLEM: PETRONIUS AND HERODAS

One of the best episodes in Petronius' *Satyrical* involves the presence of the narrator, Encolpius, his lover Giton, and the rogue-poet Eumolpus, on board a ship owned by Lichas, of which another passenger is the flighty matron, Tryphaena.¹ In an earlier episode of the novel, Lichas seems to have been the lover of Encolpius and Tryphaena of Giton, though both affairs had ended in enmity. There ensues a comic deliberation between Encolpius and Giton about ways of escape. One of them involves the ink which Eumolpus has brought aboard as a man of literature. Encolpius suggests that he and Giton dye themselves with it from head to foot and pretend to be Eumolpus' Ethiopian (that is, African) slaves. Giton contemptuously dismisses the idea, and proposes suicide. Eumolpus intervenes with what he considers a better idea. His manservant, who is a barber, will shave the heads and eyebrows of Encolpius and Giton, and then he himself 'will mark your faces with an elaborate inscription to give the impression that you have been punished with a mark. That way the same letters will both allay the suspicions of your pursuers and hide your faces with the appearance of punishment' ('sequar ego frontes notans inscriptione sollerti, ut uideamini stigmatibus esse puniti. ita eadem litterae et suspicionem declinabunt quaerentium et uultus umbra supplicii tegent'). This is agreed to, and 'Eumolpus filled the foreheads of us both with huge letters, and with generous hand covered our whole faces with the well-known inscription of runaway slaves' ('impleuit Eumolpus frontes utriusque ingentibus litteris et notum fugitiuorum epigramma per totam faciem liberali manu duxit').

However, the trick goes awry, and eventually Encolpius and Giton are brought before Lichas and Tryphaena.

Tryphaena lacrimas effudit decepta supplicio—uera enim stigmata credebat captiuorum frontibus impressa—sciscitarique submissus coepit, quod ergastulum intercepisset errantes, aut cuius tam crudeles manus in hoc supplicium durassent... concitatus iracundia prosiliit Lichas et 'o te' inquit 'feminam simplicem, tamquam uulnera ferro praeparata litteras biberint. utinam quidem hac se inscriptione maculassent: haberemus nos extremum solacium. nunc mimicis artibus petiti sumus et adumbrata inscriptione derisi.'

Tryphaena burst into tears, because she thought real marks had been stamped on our captive foreheads, and she began to ask with less haughtiness what place of forced labour

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Perdrizet (1911) = P. Perdrizet, 'La miraculeuse histoire de Pandare et d'Echédore, suivie de recherches sur la marque dans l'Antiquité', *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 14 (1911), 54-129

Dölger (1919), (1930), (1932) = F.-J. Dölger, *Antike und Christentum* 1² (1929), 2 (1930), 3 (1932)

Betz (1964) = O. Betz, art. *στίγμα*, in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* 7, 657-64

Scutt and Gotch (1974) = R. Scutt and C. Gotch, *Skin Deep: The Mystery of Tattooing* (1974)

Zimmermann (1980) = K. Zimmermann, 'Tätowierte Thrakerinnen auf griechischen Vasenbildern', *JDAI* 95 (1980), 163-96.

¹ Petr. 103. 1-5, 105. 11-106. 1. I follow the latest text of K. Müller (1978); his editorial decisions do not affect the present question. I begin with this passage since it was while teaching it that I was led into the present investigation; I am grateful to Christopher Brown and Bruce Speyer for lively discussion.

we had fallen into in our wanderings, or who had had the cruelty to steel his hands to such a punishment ... Unable to restrain his rage, Lichas jumped forward and said, 'You stupid woman! As if these were wounds prepared with iron so as to absorb letters. If only they had defiled themselves with this writing, we would have the best of satisfactions. As it is, they have played a stage-trick on us, and fooled us with mere shadow-writing.'

Most modern commentators seem to have no doubt that what Petronius means by *stigma*, the shadow-writing assumed by Encolpius and Giton, was a brand-mark.² In favour of that view there are the phrases 'frontibus impressa' ('stamped on our foreheads') and 'uulnera ferro praeparata' ('wounds prepared with iron'). Yet the phrase 'litteras biberint' ('absorb letters') and the mention of ink seem decisive for tattooing, since this was performed in antiquity, as it is now, by pricking the skin with needles dipped in ink, while ink could hardly reproduce the scars inflicted by branding.³

A passage in another author, in some ways a Greek Petronius, may be adduced. Herodas in his fifth mime depicts a lady called Bitinna whose unfaithful lover is none other than her slave Gastron. She has him stripped for a whipping, and Gastron begs her to have him tattooed if he is ever unfaithful again: the verb στίξον (l. 28) is here unambiguous, as shortly appears. For Bitinna orders Gastron dragged off to the town-jail for a lashing, but then relents. She gives orders that 'Kosis the tattooer [should] come bringing needles and ink' (Κόσιν τέ μοι κέλευσον ἔλθειν τὸν στίκτην/ἔχοντα ῥαφίδας καὶ μέλαν); when another slave tries to intercede for Gastron, she swears that he will soon 'know himself' 'when he has this inscription on his forehead' (ἐν τῷ μετώπῳ τὸ ἐπίγραμμ' ἔχων τοῦτο); in the end, however, Bitinna relents, and Gastron is let off unharmed.

The needles, the ink, the 'inscription' on the delinquent slave's forehead (though Bitinna does not spell out the text), surely indicate that Herodas is referring to only one method of punishment, tattooing.⁴ This passage, taken together with the scene in Petronius, shows that the word *stigma* and its cognates could be used in Ptolemaic Alexandria and in Neronian Rome to refer to tattooing without any fear of misinterpretation. The present paper is mainly concerned with two problems: how much did the ancients practise either tattooing or branding, and what terms did they use to describe them?

II. THE ARGUMENT

The modern tendency to interpret the word *stigma* and its cognates in reference to branding is perfectly illustrated by an encyclopaedia article on 'Stigmatization':⁵

Term derived from the Greek root stigma, meaning mark and in particular, a brand impressed by iron. It was used in antiquity to refer to marks branded on cattle, on all slaves in the Orient, and on fugitive slaves in Greece and Rome. Soldiers also, of some Eastern countries, wore stigmata.

This view, so it will be argued here, requires drastic modification. 'Stigmata' are almost always tattoo- and not brand-marks; the branding of animals is virtually never designated by *stigma* but by a word denoting a burn or a stamp; the branding of

² Thus 'la flétrissure du fer', Ernout in the Budé, 'Brandmal', Ehlers in the Heimeran.

³ Ov., *Am.* 1. 14. 25, referring to Corinna's hair, 'quam se praebuerunt ferro patienter et igni', might be compared; 'ferum et ignis' ('fire and the sword') are usually the instruments of devastation, cf. *OLD* s.v. *ferum*, but playing the indignant lover Ovid applies them to his mistress's curling-irons. It may be noted that P. Burmann in his commentary (second edition, Amsterdam 1743) 2. 197 col. i ('litteris notisque per totam faciem puncti') and 201 col. ii, where he cites Scribonius Largus 231 on the removal of *stigmata*,

seems to have understood Petronius to be talking about tattooing.

⁴ Herod. 5. 65-7, 77-9. So understood by one of the first exegetes of Herodas: O. Crusius, *Untersuchungen zu ... Herondas* (1892), 111-12. The commentary of Headlam-Knox, though full of valuable material, is confused, taking l. 66 to refer to tattooing, l. 79 to refer to branding, and l. 67 apparently to both processes. I. C. Cunningham's notes ad locc. (*Herodas, Mimiambi* (1971)), however, are correct and consistent.

⁵ *The New Catholic Encyclopaedia* 13 (1967), 711.

humans was exceptional, and is designated by the word *stigma* only rarely and at a comparatively late date.

Besides this philological argument, I shall also advance some theses, not all of them novel, which concern the history of culture. I will argue that tattooing had several functions in antiquity. One is self-decoration, which is now almost its only use but in antiquity was a practice associated with the less advanced barbarians. A second, not easily distinguished from the first, was religious, and this was associated with eastern nations such as the Egyptians and the Syrians. The most important use was for punitive purposes; this came to the Greeks from the Persians, and was transmitted by the Greeks to the Romans; among these in turn it came to be used not only for criminals, but in late antiquity also for soldiers and military workers. The branding of animals was a universal practice, but that of humans was almost unknown to the Greeks, and even among the Romans was comparatively rare.

III. TECHNIQUES OF TATTOOING AND BRANDING

Modern methods of tattooing have been so altered by technology that to get an idea of the antique practice it is worth quoting in full the description given by a seventeenth-century traveller in Jerusalem, Jean de Thévenot.⁶

Of the manner of marking what one wishes on the arm.

We passed the whole of Monday, the 29th of April, having our arms marked, as all the pilgrims usually do: the operation is performed by Christians of Bethlehem belonging to the Latin rite. They have several wooden moulds, among which you choose those you like the best. Next they fill them with charcoal powder. Then they apply them to you in such a way as to leave the mark of what is engraved on them. After that they take your arm by their left hand, stretching the skin tight; in their right hand they have a little stick with two needles, and they dip it from time to time in ink mixed with ox-gall, and prick you with it along the lines made by the wooden mould; that is presumably harmful, and as a rule there ensues a slight fever which lasts a very short time, and the arm remains swollen to three times its normal size for two or three days. After they have pricked all along these lines, they wash the arm and check to see if there is some fault, whereupon they begin again, and sometimes they resume as many as three times. When they have finished, they bandage your arm up very tight, and a scab forms which falls off two or three days later, and the marks remain in blue and never fade.

Some points deserve notice, especially where present practice differs from that observed by de Thévenot.⁷

(1) The use of needles: pricking the skin is still the essential part of tattooing, though modern practitioners often use a small electric machine instead of hand-held needles. Bleeding from the pricks, which is not mentioned by de Thévenot and is nowadays held to be a sign of poor technique, seems to have been frequent in antiquity.

(2) The use of ink: ancient tattooers are also said to use ink (μέλαν, *atramentum*), and black drawing ink is still common.

(3) The predominantly blue colour of the mark: this remains true, though already in antiquity and even more in modern times several colours can be achieved.

(4) The use of ready-made designs: this too will be seen to be common in antiquity, as it is still. De Thévenot's tattooer used moulds, whereas the modern one uses a plastic or carbon stencil; both, however, use charcoal to establish the design. De Thévenot does not mention freehand drawing, such as is frequent nowadays, no doubt because his practitioner's clientèle was a specialized one requiring a kind of emblem or badge.

⁶ Quoted by Perdrizet (1911), 113. On de Thévenot, who is also supposed to have introduced the use of coffee into France, *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Eleventh Edition), s.v. Scutt and Gotch (1974), 27, cite a very

similar account by the Prussian Otto Friedrich von der Gröben, who visited Jerusalem in 1675.

⁷ For modern practice the most helpful discussion I have seen is that of Scutt and Gotch (1974).

(5) The physical reaction, similar to that of a modern injection: this is occasionally implied in the ancient sources.

(6) An item naturally not mentioned by de Thévenot, but nevertheless of considerable importance in antiquity and nowadays, is the removal of tattoos. Nowadays this is done by means of chemical agents (usually acidic) or surgery; on the ancient method, see below at n. 15.

(7) Similarly de Thévenot does not use the word 'tattoo'. He could not have done, since it is of Tahitian origin and was introduced to English by Captain Cook in 1769, into French by Bougainville two years later.⁸

The other method of body-marking to be discussed here, that of cauterization or branding, is too familiar to need illustration. How far it was actually practised on humans in antiquity is a question best left for later: but it was customary in Europe up to the nineteenth century, for criminals in France up to 1832, and for convicts in Siberia until the reforms of 1864.⁹

Another method of body-marking, scarification by means of incisions, must also be noticed. The Greek and Romans knew it, as it is still known, as an African practice. It is often shown on representations of 'Ethiopians', and one of the devices considered by Encolpius and Giton in the passage of Petronius discussed above is that of 'cutting the face with scars' ('frontes cicatricibus scindere'), regarded as typical of 'Ethiopian' slaves.¹⁰ There is some evidence that among Greeks this was used as a kind of endurance-test: at least Lucian mentions philosophers who trained their students by forcing them to take cold baths or by whipping them, 'while the more humane mark their skins with iron'.¹¹ Lastly, there is a kind of hybrid between tattooing and cauterization, the marking of the body with red-hot needles; this is known to have been practised by certain religious sects in late antiquity.¹²

IV. THE WORD *STIGMA*, AND ANCIENT METHODS OF TATTOOING

The verb *στιζειν* means 'to prick', and is related to the English 'sting', 'stick', 'stitch', to the German 'stechen' ('prick', 'puncture'), 'Stick' ('prick', 'sting', 'puncture'), 'sticken' ('embroider'). *Stigma* first appears in Greek with reference to the spots of snakes,¹³ and it continues to bear the meaning of 'dot', 'mark', 'welt', which is one of the reasons why it is sometimes difficult to be sure that tattoo- and not brand-marks are in question.¹⁴ Yet *στιζειν* is the appropriate word to describe the process of tattooing, and *stigma* to describe the mark so made; and at least until the Roman imperial period this is the meaning suggested by the texts.

The methods of ancient tattooing, and of the removal of tattoos, can be recovered mainly from medical and pharmacological sources. The most informative is the sixth-century doctor, Aetius, who is also explicit about the meaning of the word *stigma*:¹⁵

On tattoos (περὶ στιγμαμάτων). They call 'tattoos' that which is inscribed on the face or some other part of the body, for example on the hands of soldiers, and they use the following ink. [The recipe follows.] Apply by pricking the places with needles, wiping away the blood, and rubbing in first juice of leek, and then the preparation.

⁸ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. 'Tattoo' sb.².

⁹ Perdrizet (1911), 64.

¹⁰ Petr. 102. 15. Cf. Frank M. Snowden, Jr., *Blacks in Antiquity* (1970), 22-3, though his own fig. 3 shows that it is wrong to interpret Petronius' *frontes* as 'foreheads'.

¹¹ Luc., *Nigr.* 27. Andrew J. Clark of the Metropolitan Museum, New York, has drawn to my attention a number of Attic black-figure vases, all by painters in the Leagrus group, in which male figures are shown

with incised marks (e.g. London B 497, Beazley, *ABV* 377 no. 243); perhaps these should be interpreted as a badge of 'machoism'.

¹² See below, at n. 94.

¹³ Hes., *Sc.* 166.

¹⁴ Thus *Suda* Σ 1104, Στίγματα. πληγαί, τραύματα. ἢ ποικίλματα.

¹⁵ Aet. 8. 12 (*Corpus Medicorum Graecorum* 8. 2, ed. A. Olivieri (1950), pp. 417-18).

While Aetius and some other sources mention the face (πρόσωπον), many more mention the forehead (μέτωπον), and one or two the very top of the head.¹⁶ Similarly, while Aetius mentions the tattooing of soldiers on the hands, the legal sources talk of their arms, though they mention the hands and ankles of condemned criminals; Lucian talks of tattoos on the wrist or the neck.¹⁷ Tattooing of the whole body, which is still occasionally practised even in western society, was known to the ancients only as a barbarian custom: for them, tattooing was always utilitarian, and usually a sign of degradation.

Without hygiene tattooing must always have been more or less dangerous, and this no doubt contributed to its value as a form of punishment. The reaction described in modern accounts is perhaps implied in Herodas' fourth mime, where an angry mistress threatens that a lazy slave-girl will 'scratch that filthy (?) brow (βρέγμα) of hers'; this has been taken to refer to the irritation caused by a brandmark, but a tattoo is equally possible.¹⁸ That tattooing might even be fatal is suggested by a situation imagined by the rhetorician Hermogenes, discussing circumstances in which a smaller injury may lead to a greater: 'For example, it is permitted to tattoo adulterers; one man has another tattooed and is charged with murder on the ground that the one who inflicted the cause also inflicted the result'.¹⁹

Because tattooing usually signified degradation, there are many references to its removal. Here again Aetius is explicit:²⁰

In cases where we wish to remove such tattoos, we must use the following preparations ... [There follow two prescriptions, one involving lime or gypsum (τίτανος) and sodium carbonate, the other pepper, rue and honey.] When applying, first clean the tattoos with nitre, smear them with resin of terebinth, and bandage for five days. On the sixth prick the tattoos with a pin, sponge away the blood, and then spread a little salt on the pricks; then after an interval of ten *stadioi* [presumably the time taken to travel this distance], apply the aforesaid prescription and cover it with a linen bandage. Leave on for five days, and on the sixth smear on some of the prescription with a feather (?); (the tattoos) are removed in twenty days, without great ulceration and without a scar.

Medical and technical writers prior to Aetius give a number of prescriptions for removing what they also call 'stigmata', and like him they tend to recommend ones of a caustic kind: thus Dioscorides, the Elder Pliny and Galen all prescribe *batrachion* (perhaps crowfoot), the last two remarking on its caustic properties. It seems inconceivable that such writers would have used the word 'stigma' if there was serious uncertainty about its meaning.²¹

In imperial Rome doctors regularly practised the removal of tattoos; thus Scribonius Largus tells of a man who went to several in order to have his tattoos removed, but was only helped by the author's own teacher, Trypho.²² One of the most curious references to the removal of tattoos is also among the earliest, and involves two miracles performed by the Asclepius of Epidaurus.²³ The first concerns a Thessalian

¹⁶ I give Greek examples only; it should be noted that the Latin *frons* is ambiguous, since it can mean both 'face' and 'forehead' (cf. e.g. Petr. 103. 2 and 103. 4). Face: Bion Borysth., fr. 1 A Kindstrand (Diog. Laert. 4. 46). Forehead (a selection only): *IG* IV² 1. 121. 48 (*Syll.*³ 1168), Plut., *Per.* 26. 4, *Nic.* 29. 2, Porph., *V. Pyth.* 15. Top of the head: Hdt. 5. 35. 3, *PSorb.* 2254. 4 (κορυφή); I notice in 'Tattoos: the picture changes', *Toronto Globe & Mail*, 29 March 1984, 'Where is the most unusual spot Mr. Glover has ever placed a tattoo? "Right on top of the head. It was a Canadian flag and this guy was the classic skinhead"'.
¹⁷ *Cod. Theod.* 9. 40. 2 = *Cod. Iust.* 9. 47. 17 (arms also in Call. fr. 203. 56 Pfeiffer); *Cod. Theod.* 10. 22. 4; Luc., *Syr. D.* 59.
¹⁸ Herod. 4. 51. A reference to branding is preferred

by Headlam-Knox and Cunningham.

¹⁹ Hermog., *Stat.* p. 90 Rabe, p. 67 Kowalski.

²⁰ Aet., *ibid.* (above, n. 15).

²¹ Dsc., *Mat. Med.* 2. 175. 2, Pliny, *NH* 25. 173, Galen, *De Simpl.* 6. 2. 5 (XI 849 K., where Kühn's translation is in error). Other remedies in Dsc., *De Simpl.* 110 (116), Scr. Largus, *Comp.* 231, Pliny, *NH* 25. 175, 26. 22, Galen, *De Rem. parabil.* 2. 5. 13 (xiv 420 K.).

²² Scr. Largus, *Comp.* 231. Cf. Mart. 6. 64. 26 ('stigmata nec uafra delebit Cinnamus arte'); 10. 56. 6 ('tristia seruorum stigmata delet Eros').

²³ *IG* IV² 1. 121. 48-54, 54-68 (*SIG*³ 1168). For discussion, O. Weinreich, *Antike Heilungswunder, Religionsgesch. Vers. u. Vorarb.* 8. 1 (1909), 90, 96 n. 2; Perdrizet (1911).

called Pandarus who had tattoos (στιγμάτω) on his forehead; he dreamed that the god tied a bandage (ταυνίον) on his face and told him to remove it outside the sanctuary; when he did so, the 'letters' had been transferred from his face to the bandage, which he dedicated 'with the letters from his forehead'. Pandarus then commissioned a certain Echedorus to make a dedication to the god, but Echedorus sequestered the money; he too had a dream in which the god appeared and wrapped Pandarus' bandage on his head, and when Echedorus awoke and removed the bandage he had 'received Pandarus' letters as well as his own tattoos'. Whatever the facts behind this account, the bandage recalls Aetius' prescription for removing tattoos, and perhaps the priests of Asclepius performed an early version of this operation on Pandarus.

For those who did not wish, or could not afford, to resort to priests or doctors, there were simpler devices. Porphyry relates how the Thracian Zamolxis became a slave of Pythagoras, and during his master's wanderings 'fell among bandits, was tattooed, and as a result bandaged his forehead because of his tattoos'. Another expedient was to grow the hair over the brow.²⁴

V. NON-GREEK TATTOOING: RELIGIOUS

The earliest clear evidence for tattooing comes from Egypt. Here it is first found on mummies of the Eleventh Dynasty, and seems usually to have had an erotic significance; the colour used was a 'dark, blackish-blue pigment applied with a pricking instrument, perhaps consisting of one or more fish bones set into a wooden handle'.²⁵ The practice is also found among the early Israelites, since Leviticus includes the injunction, 'You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh on account of the dead: you shall not tattoo yourselves'. The Hebrew actually uses the word 'writing', qualified by a verbal form unique to this passage, but the Rabbinic interpretation understood tattooing, and so also did the Christian one; the Septuagint translates γράμματω στικτά.²⁶ Isaiah can predict that at the End of Days even the Jews will adopt the practice: 'This one will say, "I am the Lord's",... and another will write on his hand, "The Lord's"'; the Hebrew actually says, 'To the Lord', as if Isaiah thought of the mark as one of self-dedication.²⁷

In the Graeco-Roman period, religious tattooing continues to be found primarily in the lands of the eastern Mediterranean. Herodotus reports of a temple of an Egyptian god whom he calls Heracles, 'If a slave, whoever his master be, flees here and applies the sacred *stigmata*, giving himself to the god (ἑωυτὸν διδοὺς τῷ θεῷ), it is forbidden to lay hold of him', and this seems likely to refer to a tattoo.²⁸ The practice of sacred tattooing, especially on the wrist, is first attested for the Syrians in the Ptolemaic period. A papyrus of the mid-second century contains a description of a runaway slave from Bambyke (Hierapolis), where the 'Syrian goddess' Atargatis had her great sanctuary. The slave was 'tattooed (ἐστιγμένως) on the right wrist with two barbarian letters', and Ulrich Wilcken brilliantly proposed that the two letters represented the Syrian initials of Atargatis and her consort Hadad.²⁹ Writing of the same sanctuary, Lucian says of the devotees of the goddess, 'They are all tattooed (στιζονται), some on the wrist, some on the neck, and as a result all the Assyrians have tattoos (στιγματοφορέουσιν)'.³⁰ Though none of these sources says explicitly that tattooing is meant and not branding, that is corroborated by the persistence of sacred tattooing in these same areas up to the present. De Thévenot's experience in

²⁴ Porph., *V. Pyth.* 15; cf. Mart. 2. 29. 9-10, a poseur who used plasters (*splenia*) to conceal his *stigmata* (though this may refer to the after-effects of a surgical operation). Hair over brow: Diphilus fr. 66. 7-8 K., Liban. 25. 21 (2. 546 F.).

²⁵ Richard S. Bianchi in *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* 6 (1985), 145-6. Cf. de Thévenot's reference to a 'little stick with two needles', above, at n. 6.

²⁶ Lev. 19. 28; I am grateful to Glen Bowersock for information about the Hebrew, and to Ranon Katzoff

for help with this and related texts. For the Rabbinic interpretation, *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, s.v. Tattoo. Cf. Dölger (1929), 197-201; Betz (1964), 660-1.

²⁷ Isaiah 44. 5.

²⁸ Hdt. 2. 113. 1. Thus understood by Headlam-Knox on Herod. 5. 66; see especially Dölger (1932), 257-8.

²⁹ *PPar.* 10. 8-9; Wilcken, *UPZ* 121, establishing the reading *δυσίν* and giving this explanation.

³⁰ Luc., *Syr. D.* 59.

seventeenth-century Jerusalem has already been mentioned; in the early twentieth, the visitor to a Coptic church might be surrounded by children displaying the sign of the Cross tattooed on their right wrists and shrieking, 'Nosrani (Christian)! Bakshish!'.³¹

VI. NON-GREEK TATTOOING: DECORATIVE

The Greeks and Romans knew of religious tattooing, but only few of them practised it. The same is even truer of a second function, decoration. This was associated above all with the Thracians, and in this case it is clear that *stigma* refers to tattooing. Numerous vase-paintings, chiefly Attic, show Thracian women, usually slaves, with marks usually placed on the leg or the arm and consisting of designs such as spirals around the wrist or animal figures such as deer. The nature of the designs shows that they are tattooed, not branded, and this is now the interpretation usually given.³²

An Attic white-ground cup of about 470 depicts a Thracian woman slaying Orpheus; on her right shoulder she is tattooed with an animal, perhaps a deer, and on the inside of her left forearm with a pattern of diagonal lines.³³ In literature also, Thracian tattooing is usually ascribed to women and sometimes connected with the death of Orpheus. According to the early Hellenistic poet Phanocles, the Thracians tattooed (ἔστιζον) their wives 'so that having blue marks in their flesh they should not forget the abhorred crime' (ἵν' ἐν χροῖ σήματα ἔχουσιν/κυάνεα στυγεροῦ μή λελάθωντο φόνου); it is interesting for the Greek view of tattooing that it turns a decorative, perhaps religious, practice into a punitive one.³⁴ An anonymous epigram gives a different version, saying that the Thracian women 'bloodied their arms with letters' (στικτοὺς ἡμάξαντο βραχιόννας) in mourning for Orpheus.³⁵ Clearchus gives yet another explanation of the custom, but again implies that it was originally penal: the Thracians were defeated in war by the Scythians, and the Scythian women punished the Thracian by 'decorating their bodies with writing (γραφῆν)', which they applied with pins: the Thracian women then decorated the rest of their bodies in order to turn 'the stamp of violence and shame' into an ornament.³⁶ Despite these traditions there is evidence that Thracian males also were tattooed; thus Lysias refers contemptuously to a certain Theocritus 'son of Elaphostictus (Deer-tattooed)', and he probably means that the man's father was a Thracian, tattooed with a deer like some of the women in the vase-paintings.³⁷

These references to the myth of Orpheus make it certain that when authors use the word *stigma* of the Thracians, they refer to tattooing. The first to do so is Herodotus, who makes a point often repeated by others, that for the Thracians 'to be tattooed is considered a mark of good birth, and not to be is a mark of bad': this again shows that for a Greek *stigmata* implied degradation.³⁸ The same point is made by the author of the *Dissoi Logoi*: 'for the Thracians it is an adornment for girls to be tattooed, but for other people it is a punishment for wrongdoers (τοῖς ἀδικέοντι)'.³⁹ Several Greek writers of the second century A.D. refer to Thracian tattooing, and again use *stigma* or a cognate.⁴⁰

³¹ Perdrizet (1911), 109.

³² The credit for adducing the evidence of vases is due to Wolters (1903), esp. 268; like other early students of the subject, however, he took the word *stigma* when applied to Greeks to refer to branding. On the vases the fundamental study is now Zimmermann (1980).

³³ A superb plate in B. Graef et al., *Die Antiken Vasen von der Akropolis zu Athen* 2. 1 (1929), pl. 36; Zimmermann (1980), 177 with pl. 13.

³⁴ Powell, *Coll. Alex.* Phanocles fr. 1. 25-9: Powell adduces Plut., *De sera num. vind.* 557D, οὐδὲ γὰρ Θράκας ἐπαινούμεν, ὅτι στίζουσιν ἄχρι νῦν τὰς ἑαυτῶν γυναικας.

³⁵ *Anth. Pal.* 7. 10. 1-3.

³⁶ Athen. 12. 524D-E = Clearchus fr. 46 Wehrli (*Schule des Aristoteles* 3² (1969)).

³⁷ Lys. 13. 19; for this interpretation, Crusius (1903) and Wolters (1903), both arguing against W. Dittenberger, *Hermes* 37 (1902), 298-301, who took Lysias to refer to branding; other evidence for the tattooing of Thracian males in Wolters, 273.

³⁸ Hdt. 5. 6. 2.

³⁹ Diels, *Vors.* 2. 408, Robinson, p. 108.

⁴⁰ Plut., *De sera num. vind.* 557D (above, n. 34); Dio Chrys. 14. 19; Artemid. 1. 8; cf. Sext. Emp., *Pyrrh.* 3. 202 (Sarmatians and Egyptians).

Other tribes are also described as using decorative *stigmata*. The Mossynoikoi encountered by the Ten Thousand on the Pontic coast resembled the Thracians in reserving tattoos for the well-born: 'they showed them children of good families ... entirely decorated on back and front, being tattooed (ἔστιγμένους) with flowers'; Strabo describes the Iapodes in the eastern Alps as 'tattooed (κατάστικτοι) like the other Illyrians and Thracians'; according to Herodian the Britons 'tattoo (στίζονται) their bodies with various designs (γραφαί) and pictures of all kinds of animals'.⁴¹

VII. PENAL TATTOOING: PERSIA

The third function of tattooing in antiquity is penal. Here the evidence is abundant well into the Byzantine period, but serious problems of translation and interpretation arise, since there is no doubt that branding was usual at least in certain epochs and in certain areas of the ancient world, nor that *stigma* was occasionally used of brands or burn-marks, as well as of other ones such as welts. Penal tattooing can in its turn be roughly divided into three kinds, again not absolute: that inflicted on delinquent slaves, on criminals, and on prisoners of war.

It happens that two of these are mentioned in three well-known passages of Herodotus. It will be best to begin with the clearest case, though it does not involve a delinquent slave but rather the opposite. Histiaeus of Miletus sent a message from his honourable confinement in Susa to his son-in-law Aristagoras, urging him to stir the Ionians up against Darius. 'He shaved the head of the trustiest of his slaves and tattooed it (ἔστιξε), and waited for the hair to grow back. As soon as it had, he sent the slave off to Miletus, giving him no other order than that, when he reached Miletus, Aristagoras was to shave off his hair and look at his head; and the tattoos (*stigmata*) signified revolt.'⁴² This ingenious if cumbrous device caught the fancy of later collectors of stratagems; Polyaeus is able to report the message, 'Histiaeus to Aristagoras: make Ionia revolt', and Nicephorus Ouranius in the late tenth century says, 'He pricked (ἐκέντησεν) letters with pin and ink'.⁴³ This must be right, for whatever the message it could hardly have been conveyed by brandmarks, even if they could have been safely applied to the top of the head or concealed by hair. If so, it is to be noted that Histiaeus had the slave tattooed in Susa, for there are other reasons to suppose that the tattooing of slaves came to the Greeks from the Persians.

In the other two passages from Herodotus, and the last two in which he uses the word *stigma*, it is again in connection with the Persians. Enraged with the Hellespont because of the storm which had destroyed his first bridge, Xerxes 'ordered three hundred lashes of the whip to be applied to it and a pair of fetters to be thrown into the water. And indeed I have also heard that with these he sent tattooers (στιγέας) to tattoo (στίζειν) the Hellespont. The agents were instructed to say: "O cruel water, your master (δεσπότης) imposes this penalty upon you because you wronged him when he had not wronged you (ἠδίκησας οὐδὲν πρὸς ἐκείνου ἄδικον παθόν); and King Xerxes will cross you whether you like it or no"'. The word στιγέας occurs only here and in the *Suda*, and Macan comments thus: 'Liddell and Scott render it "tattooers" with no reference but this passage. To tattoo the sea would indeed be a feat. Were not "hot irons" rather in question? Xerxes had the necessary operators and instruments in his train, according to the anecdote *c.* 233 *infra*'.⁴⁴ The passage cited makes the argument circular, since Herodotus again uses *stigma* without further indication of the method, and several commentators have already supposed that it refers to tattooing. As for the consideration that tattooing the sea 'would indeed be a feat', that is why the story is 'too much for Herodotus', and in any case branding water is no less a feat than tattooing it.

⁴¹ Xen., *Anab.* 5. 4. 32; Str. 7. 5. 4 (C 315); Hdn. 3. 14. 7.

⁴² Hdt. 5. 35. For tattooing in this place, see above, n. 16.

⁴³ Polyaeus., *Str.* 1. 24; Niceph. Our. 116; note also A. Gell. 17. 9. 22, 'caput eius leue in litterarum formas

compungit'. On all this, see the excellent discussion of J.-A. de Foucault, *REG* 80 (1967), 182-6.

⁴⁴ Hdt. 7. 35; *Suda* Σ 1103 (below, at n. 108); R. W. Macan, *Herodotus: The Seventh, Eighth and Ninth Books* 1. 1 (1908), 49. Branding is understood by How and Wells, and also in the Loeb and Budé translations.

The passage to which Macan appealed is also a well-known one, and concerns the marking of prisoners of war, though the line between these and public slaves is narrow, all the more so in a Persian context. The Thebans who deserted to the Persians, says Herodotus ironically, 'did not entirely prosper': the barbarians killed some of them, but 'marked the majority with the royal tattoos' (ἔστιξαν στίγματα βασιλῆα). Macan here notes that earlier commentators had variously understood tattooing and branding, and that in other passages of Herodotus tattooing either must or may be meant; 'but in the case of slaves, and such like, and for punishment, "branding" is the probable process'. Of the items he adduces in support, one is in Herodotus, but concerns the different process of blinding with hot irons (7. 18), while the others involve passages in which Plutarch uses *stigma*, so that Macan's argument is again circular.⁴⁵

Thus Herodotus seems to confirm that it was Persian practice to tattoo slaves and prisoners of war. The Greeks used tattoos primarily as a punishment, and it seems likely that they learned to do so from Persia. The first allusion to a στίγματις (a tattooed slave, or perhaps criminal) is in a fragment of the poet Asius of Samos, who is usually placed in the sixth century; and this luxurious city, on the fringes of the Persian empire, could well have been one of the first to adopt this barbarian custom.⁴⁶ In Athens the earliest evidence for tattooing is just prior to the Persian Wars. An Attic amphora of about 510 shows *Dike* (Justice) slaying *Adikia* (Injustice), a scene also represented on the box or cabinet (λάβραξ) which Cypselus dedicated at Olympia; Injustice has little circular marks which look like tattoos on her arms and shoulders. There seems an evident connection with the tattoos which the author of the *Dissoi Logoi* calls 'a punishment for wrongdoers', though it is curious that Injustice should not have punitive tattoos on the face, but rather ones of an ornamental type on her arms and shoulders, as if she were a Thracian.⁴⁷

VIII. PENAL TATTOOING AMONG THE GREEKS AND ROMANS: SLAVES

The tattooing of delinquent slaves, often runaways, is frequently mentioned in Attic comedy. A character in Eupolis threatens to tattoo another 'with three needles' (στίξω σε βελόνασιον τρισίν), no doubt referring to an elaborate job in three colours.⁴⁸ In the world of the *Birds* what is normally considered ugly will be beautiful, and a 'tattooed runaway (δραπέτης ἔστιγμένος) will be called a spotted francolin'.⁴⁹ In the *Frogs*, Pluto sends a message by Aeschylus to Cleophon and others in the world above: 'tell them to come quickly to me here and not to linger; if they haven't arrived soon, by Apollo I'll tattoo (στίξω) them, fetter them with Adeimantus the son of Leukolophus, and soon send them below ground'; that is, Pluto will treat these petty politicians as runaways, subjecting them at the same time to a tattoo and fetters, a pair of penalties also conjoined in Herodotus' anecdote about Xerxes.⁵⁰ Just as Bitinna in Herodas threatens to have Gastron strung up and tattooed, so the angry Demeas in Menander's *Samia* calls for a thong to bind the 'impious' (ἄσεβής) Parmeno before tattooing him (στίξω σε), though (again as in Herodas) the threat is not fulfilled.⁵¹

The fondness of Old Comedy for the subject of tattooing encouraged metaphorical references to it. In the *Wasps*, the slave Xanthias exclaims, 'I'm being tattooed to

⁴⁵ Hdt. 7. 233. 2; Macan (previous n.), 342, citing Plut., *Per.* 26. 4, *Nic.* 29. 2, *De Her. malign.* 866F–867B; on the first two see below, at nn. 66 and 69, and throughout the third Plutarch uses στίξω and στίγματα in discussing the present passage of Herodotus.

⁴⁶ Asius: Athen. 3. 125D (West, *Iambi et Elegi Graeci* 2. 46; Gentili-Prato, *Poetae Elegiaci* 1. 129); for Asius on Samian luxury, Athen. 12. 525F (Kinkel, *Ep. Gr. Fr.* 206 fr. 13). I am grateful to Christopher Brown for advice about this poet.

⁴⁷ Vienna 3722; Beazley, *ARV²* 11 no. 3; *CVA Österreich, Wien*, p. 51; J. Frel, ΓΕΡΑΣ: *Studies presented to*

George Thomson, *Graecolatina Pragensia* 2 (1963), 95–8 with pl. 1; *Enc. dell' Arte Antica* 1. 66, pl. 101. On the chest of Cypselus, Paus. 5. 18. 2 (cf. H. Stuart-Jones, *JHS* 14 (1894), 69).

⁴⁸ Eup. 259 K. So interpreted by Headlam-Knox on Herod. 5. 67.

⁴⁹ Ar., *Av.* 760–1.

⁵⁰ Ar., *Ran.* 1508–14. Cf. Plut., *De cohob. Ira* 463 B, calling στίγματα and πέδαι marks of a master's harshness.

⁵¹ Men., *Sam.* 321–4 (106–9), cf. 654–7 (309–12).

death with a stick' (ἀπόλωλα στιζόμενος βρακτηρία); the meaning is probably not that he had been beaten black and blue but that his master had used the point of his stick.⁵² The disputed reference in the lost *Babylonians* to the Samian people as 'lettered' (πολυγράμματος) may, if it refers to tattooing, also play on the meaning 'learned'; certainly Plautus uses *litteratus* in the same double sense.⁵³

The penal tattooing of slaves seems to have been usual in the Hellenistic period. In the third century it is attested by a fragmentary legal code, one provision of which is that masters may not 'sell slaves for export, nor tattoo (στιζειν) them. The ban seems only to have applied to good slaves, however, for another clause, referring to ones convicted of crimes, lays down that the injured party 'shall give him not less than a hundred lashes of the whip and tattoo his forehead (στιξάτω τὸ μέτωπον)'.⁵⁴

In the same period there first appears a practice which may be as old as punitive tattooing itself, that of tattooing delinquent slaves with the name of their offence.⁵⁵ About a generation before Herodas Bion the Borysthenite described his father as a freedman 'who had, not a face, but a narrative on his face (συγγραφὴν ἐπὶ τοῦ προσώπου), the mark of his master's harshness'. Here too tattooing seems to be meant: branding a long account of a slave's misdemeanours would be very arduous, if not physically impossible.⁵⁶ It is unclear what 'inscription' (ἐπίγραμμα) Bitinna intended for Gastron; but in Petronius Eumolpus inscribes Encolpius and Giton with 'the well-known inscription of runaways ('fugitiuorum epigramma') all over the face'. An idea of this inscription may be given by a scholion to Aeschines, which affirms that runaway slaves were tattooed on the brow, 'that is, inscribed, "Stop me, I'm a runaway (κάτεχέ με, φεύγω)'''.⁵⁷

IX. PENAL TATTOOING: CRIMINALS

The second form of penal tattooing is for criminals: again, the line between this and the tattooing of slaves is narrow. It has already been seen that an Attic amphora shows Injustice marked with tattoos, and that the author of the *Dissoi Logoi* considered them to be a punishment for criminals (τιμωρία τοῖς ἀδικέοντι) among all peoples other than the Thracians. Though Plato does not use the word *stigma*, tattooing is presumably what he means when he ordains that 'if anyone is caught committing sacrilege, if he be a slave or a stranger, let his offence be written on his face and his hands'.⁵⁸ There seems no reason why Greeks of the classical and Hellenistic periods should not have punished criminals in this way frequently, but after Plato the practice is only attested under the Roman empire. According to Suetonius, Caligula 'had many people of the better sort first defaced by the marks of tattoos ('stigmatum notis') and then condemned them to the mines and the paving of roads'.⁵⁹ A constitution of Constantine lays down that a person condemned to a gladiatorial school or the mines should not be inscribed ('scribatur') on the face, but rather on the hands or the calves, 'so that the face, which has been formed in the image of the divine beauty, should be defiled as little as possible'.⁶⁰ The tattooing of criminals is spectacularly attested as late as the ninth century, when the iconoclastic emperor Theophilus punished two convicted idolaters thus: 'he first had them severely beaten, then he had their faces tattooed (κατέστιξε), and poured ink into the marks (στιγμαῖς), and the tattoos (τὰ στίγματα) formed letters'; and Zonaras proceeds to write out the twelve lines of

⁵² Ar., *Vesp.* 1296, with the discussion of Gomme and Sandbach on Men., *Sam.* 323.

⁵³ Ar. fr. 71 Kassel-Austin; Pl., *Cas.* 401; on both passages see below.

⁵⁴ *PLille* 29 i 13-14, ii 33-6, with improvements and discussion in Mitteis, *Chrestomathie*, pp. 277-9 and no. 369, P. Meyer, *Juristische Papyri* (1920), no. 71; on this document see also A. I. Pavlovskaya in T. V. Blavatskaya et al., *Die Sklaverei in hellenistischen Staaten im 3.-1. Jh. v. Chr.* (1972), 185-99.

⁵⁵ For criminals, however, it is first attested in Plato:

see below, at n. 58.

⁵⁶ D.L. 4. 46; cf. 'totam faciem' in Petr. 103. 4. In favour of branding, J. F. Kindstrand, *Bion of Borysthenes* (1976), 179-80.

⁵⁷ Σ Aesch. 2. 83.

⁵⁸ Pl., *Leg.* 854D.

⁵⁹ Suet., *Cal.* 27. 3. For *nota* of tattoo-marks cf. Cic., *Off.* 2. 25, 'compunctum Thraciis notis'.

⁶⁰ *Cod. Theod.* 9. 40. 2 = *Cod. Iust.* 9. 47. 17. On this constitution, and for tattooing as the correct interpretation, F. Millar, *PBSR* 52 (1984), 128.

execrable poetry printed on the offenders' faces.⁶¹ This function of tattooing has not entirely disappeared in modern times. A late echo of it is found as late as 1871 in the British Army, where delinquent soldiers were tattooed with the letters D. and B.C. for *Deserter* and *Bad Character*; the technique involved a 'spring-loaded instrument consisting of a bunch of needles dipped in a mixture of gunpowder and durable ink which punctured the skin in the shape of one-inch letters'.⁶² This function of tattooing is also implicit in the notorious use of it in Nazi concentration camps.

In the imperial period there appears yet another development in the marking of humans: free persons might be wrongfully claimed as slaves or criminals, tattooed, and put to hard labour. Thus Tryphaena supposes in Petronius that Encolpius and Giton must have been thrown into an *ergastulum*; an exactly contemporary story told by Scribonius Largus concerns a steward of the notorious Calvisius Sabinus who was shipwrecked, tattooed by his rescuers, and placed in an *ergastulum*. A generation later, Quintilian considers the hypothesis that a man may 'write tattoos on a fugitive, and when the person is declared freeborn, assert that he had not known he was free'.⁶³

In late antiquity there is yet another evolution in the use of tattoos: this is its extension to common soldiers and workers in military factories (*fabricenses*). It has been seen that Aetius in the sixth century regards the tattooing of the hands of soldiers as typical. The earliest evidence seems to come from the late fourth. Vegetius describes how recruits receive preliminary training and are then 'inscribed with permanent dots in the flesh' ('uicturis in cute punctis scripti'); these dots apparently showed the emblems of the soldier's unit (*puncta signorum*).⁶⁴ A constitution of 398 lays down that '*stigmata*, that is, a public mark, must be made on the arms of *fabricenses* in the manner of recruits, so that in this way at least they may be recognized if they hide'.⁶⁵ Behind this evolution there seem to be two converging tendencies: the ever-growing reliance of the Byzantine state on the upkeep of its armies, and a process of systematic exploitation, whereby soldiers and military workers were marked for life with the insignia of their professions.

X. PENAL TATTOOING: PRISONERS OF WAR

The third type of penal tattooing, this, too, close to the others already discussed, involves prisoners of war. It has been argued above that Herodotus means that the Thebans who deserted to the Persians were tattooed, and if so the 'royal tattoos' must have been some fixed design, either letters or a pattern, such as de Thévenot encountered in Jerusalem and is still used today. A much-discussed incident in the history of the Samian revolt against Athens has often been thought to refer to branding. Plutarch relates that the Athenians marked their Samian prisoners on the forehead (ἔστιζον εἰς τὸ μέτωπον) with the *samaina*, a type of Samian ship, while the Samians marked their Athenian ones with an owl; other sources referring to this incident more plausibly say that each side marked its prisoners with its own emblem, and Plutarch seems to have slipped.⁶⁶ He goes on to say that Aristophanes was thought to allude to this incident in a line of his *Babylonians*, 'It's the people of Samos; how lettered they are' (Σαμίων ὁ δῆμος ἐστίν· ὡς πολυγράμματος). The playwright seems to have referred to some kind of degradation, since the line was spoken by someone who saw the Babylonians (evidently slaves) emerging from the mill, the preferred place for such delinquents.⁶⁷ The word 'lettered' would suit both branding and tattooing, but since Plutarch refers to the forehead, and he and the other sources concur in using

⁶¹ Zon. 3. 409 Dind.; Perdrizet (1911), 82 n. 1, 83 n. 1.

⁶² P. Burroughs, *English Historical Review* 100 (1985), 570.

⁶³ Petr. 105. 11; Scr. Larg. 231; Quint. 7. 4. 14.

⁶⁴ Veg. 1. 8; 2. 5.

⁶⁵ *Cod. Theod.* 10. 22. 4.

⁶⁶ Plut., *Per.* 26. 4. For the other sources (especially Phot., *Lex.* s.v. Σαμίων ὁ δῆμος = Douris, *FGrHist* 76 F 66) see Kassel and Austin, *PCG* 3. 2 (Aristophanes) fr. 71.

⁶⁷ Hesych. s.v. Σαμίων ὁ δῆμος. Cf. Apuleius' description of slaves or convicts in a mill (*Met.* 9. 12. 4), 'frontes litterati et capillum semirasi et pedes anulati'.

στιζειν, the second is probably meant.⁶⁸ Whether Aristophanes in fact referred to a punishment inflicted on the Samians some ten years before does not require an answer here, but he may simply mean that they frequently practised tattooing; it may be recalled that an author from Samos was the first to use any form of the verb στιζειν with reference to tattooing. If it is accepted that the Athenians and Samians practised tattooing on this occasion, the same must be true of the Sicilians who sold their Athenian captives as slaves, 'marking them with a horse on the forehead' (στιζοντες ἵππου εἰς τὸ μέτωπον); it follows that what was initially a Persian practice had now become accepted among the Greeks.⁶⁹ A curious story told by Vitruvius, if true, would attest to the continued use of tattooing for prisoners of war in the fourth century, though it may be a Hellenistic fiction. After defeating the Rhodians, Artemisia of Halicarnassus set up a trophy showing 'two statues, one of the city of Rhodes and the other in her own likeness, and in her anger represented herself putting tattoos on the city of Rhodes' ('Rhodiorum ciuitati stigmata imponentem').⁷⁰ This seems to be the last occasion on which this punishment for prisoners of war is attested, though Aelius Aristides recounts a dream in which certain of the barbarians (presumably Parthians) got him in their power and one of them prepared to tattoo him (ὡς στιζοντα); if this is more than fantasy, it would indicate that the Arsacids had preserved a custom of their Achaemenid predecessors.⁷¹

XI. METAPHORICAL STIGMATA

From the tattooing of delinquents and of prisoners of war must come the metaphorical application of *stigma* to a mark of disgrace or ridicule. The earliest example is also the most remarkable, an anonymous fragment of early Hellenistic elegy in which the poet, or perhaps a speaker in his poem, addresses an enemy. The speaker has obviously been wronged, since at the beginning of the fragment he refers to 'virgin Justice' (Δίκη παρθένος). The connection must be that already observed between tattooing and injustice, for he next threatens to tattoo his enemy on the crown of the head (κορυφῇ, l. 4) with the stone of Tantalus, and on a place which has plausibly been restored as the forehead ([ἐπάνωθ' ὀφρύων, l. 14) with the Calydonian boar.⁷² Callimachus similarly says of a fellow-poet that 'he says I am a slave, and one sold twice over, and... tattoos my arm (καὶ δοῦλον εἶναί φησι καὶ παλίμμητον/καὶ τοῦ πρ...ου τὸν βραχίονα στιζει).⁷³ Suetonius observes that Catullus' poetry put 'perpetua stigmata' on Julius Caesar, and in exactly the same way Socrates the ecclesiastical historian talks of the 'perpetual stigmata (στίγματα διηνεκῆ)' which Julian's *Misopogon* had placed on Antioch.⁷⁴ In his speech *In defence of the Four*, Aelius Aristides accuses Plato thus: 'you never tattooed (ἔστιξας) any of your own slaves, but you have as good as tattooed the most honoured of the Greeks'.⁷⁵

One such metaphorical use of *stigma* was to have a very profound effect, St Paul's claim to have 'the marks of Jesus' (τὰ στίγματα τοῦ Ἰησοῦ) on his body. It is probable that he actually refers to marks caused by ill-treatment, but regards them figuratively as the tattoos imposed on him as a slave of Christ.⁷⁶ Out of St Paul grew the medieval use of the word *stigma* for marks received on the body by participation in Jesus' sufferings, either by self-laceration or by mystic transmission, and this use may have

⁶⁸ This was the conclusion of Crusius (1903), 127 (though in n. 7 he refers to branding); branding is assumed by Wolters (1903), 265-6.

⁶⁹ Plut., *Nic.* 29. 2.

⁷⁰ Vitr. 2. 8. 15, cf. Perdrizet (1911), 72 n. 2. On the problem of this story's authenticity, see now S. Hornblower, *Mausolus* (1982), 129.

⁷¹ Arist. 47. 9.

⁷² *PSorb.* 2254: see now H. Lloyd-Jones and P. J. Parsons, *Supplementum Hellenisticum*, Texte und Kommentare 11 (1983), 478-81 no. 970. I am very grateful to Hugh Lloyd-Jones for drawing this passage to my attention and discussing both it and Callimachus

(next n.) with me.

⁷³ Call., *Iamb.* XIII, fr. 203, 55-6 Pfeiffer.

⁷⁴ Suet., *Iul.* 73; Socr., *Hist. Eccl.* 3. 17 (Migne, PG 67. 425B).

⁷⁵ Arist. 3. 651 (p. 507. 6-8 Behr): cf. 3. 392 (p. 428. 10 Behr), where Pericles addresses Plato: 'take us and tattoo us (στιξον λαβών) and be a Dionysius to us rather than a Plato'; the implication is that Dionysius tattooed Plato during his notorious captivity, though this does not seem otherwise attested.

⁷⁶ *Gal.* 6. 17, with the discussion of Betz (1964), 662-3; the *New English Bible* translates 'the marks of Jesus branded on my body'.

fostered the belief that the word primarily signified branding. There may be another allusion to tattooing in the Christian New Testament, though *stigma* is not used. Revelation says of the Scarlet Woman, 'On her forehead was written a name of mystery, "Babylon the Great, mother of harlots and of earth's abominations"'; the author perhaps imagines the Woman not only as a whore, but as a whore of the most degraded kind, a tattooed slave.⁷⁷

XII. BRANDING: THE BRANDING OF ANIMALS

So far this study has tried to discuss only those passages in which *stigma* can or must mean 'tattoo'. Since, however, the word at some date apparently in the Roman period came also to be used of branding, it is best to begin with the unambiguous evidence for branding in antiquity.

The comparatively straightforward practice of animal branding is still familiar to many cultures. The first evidence for it, as for tattooing, is Egyptian; it goes back as far as the Old Kingdom, and both illustrations and actual implements have been found.⁷⁸ The Greeks and Romans used it, like the moderns, with bovines, but also with equines and in Egypt with camels.⁷⁹ The statue of a horse and rider found in the sea off Cape Artemision and now in the National Museum in Athens shows on the right haunch of the horse an impression of Victory holding out a crown, an appropriate emblem for a champion horse.⁸⁰ In recent years two large finds of cavalry-officers' tokens have been made in Athens, one in the Kerameikos and the other in the Agora. The inscriptions on them mention among other things the marks branded on the officers' horses, for example, axe, thunderbolt, ivy-leaf, and owl.⁸¹

Some of the tokens use the word χαρακτήρ ('stamp') to signify the mark, and literary sources use words which have either this connotation (χάραγμα, *nota*), or ones which, like the English 'brand', refer to the use of heat (ἐγκαίειν, καυτηριάζω, καυτήριον, *inurere*). That this process was for a long time sharply distinguished from tattooing is suggested by the fact that authors who use one of these two groups of words for the former use *stigma* or a cognate for the latter.⁸² Thus Dio Chrysostom argues from their insignia that there is no essential difference between kings and slaves. If it seems odd that a slave 'wearing fetters or tattooed or working in the mill' (πέδας ἔχων ἢ ἐστιγμένος ἢ ἐν μυλῶνι ἀλῶν) can be free, in Thrace free women are full of tattoos (στιγμάτων μεσάς), and the higher their rank the more they have; it follows that a queen may be tattooed, and so a king too. On the other hand, kings deck themselves with emblems such as crowns and sceptres in order to declare their status, 'just as, I think, owners put brands on their cattle (τοῖς βοσκήμασι χαρακτήρας ἐπιβάλλουσιν) so as to be able to recognize them'.⁸³ Several papyri of the Roman period mention brands on horses and camels, for example, 'two female camels, one stamped (κεχαραγμένην) on the haunch with an Arabic mark, the other unstamped (ἀχάρακτον)'; yet these documents never use *stigma* to refer to branding.⁸⁴ The only author who seems to use στίζειν for the branding of animals is Photius, who glosses στίξαι as τὸ ἐγκαῦσαι ἵππων; but there is other evidence that by the ninth century the original sense of *stigma* was often forgotten.⁸⁵

⁷⁷ Rev. 17. 5.

⁷⁸ A. Eggebrecht, *Lexikon der Agyptologie* 1 (1975), 850-1.

⁷⁹ Oxen or sheep may be meant in a law of Ios referring to the branding (καῦσαι) of sacred animals, F. Sokolowski, *Lois Sacrées des cités grecques* (1969), no. 105. 3.

⁸⁰ K. Braun, *MDAI(A)* 85 (1970), 260 with Pl. 92. 1.

⁸¹ Braun (previous n.), 256-67, with a very full discussion of brand-marks in art; J. H. Kroll, *Hesperia* 46 (1977), 83-140; J. and L. Robert, *Bull. épigr.* 1978. 162, 163.

⁸² This point is clearly brought out by Dölger (1932),

25-61; among the authors he cites are Str. 5. 1. 9 (C 215) and Plut., *De gen. Socr.* 593B. For the evolution of the word χαρακτήρ in its ethical sense, A. Körte, *Hermes* 64 (1929), 68-86.

⁸³ Dio Chrys. 14. 18-24. For the association of tattooing with fetters and the mill, see above, n. 67.

⁸⁴ *Sammelbuch* 6. 9640; other references in Dölger (1932), 28-9. Betz (1964), 658. 10, cites *BGU* 2. 469. 3-7 for *stigma* applied to a brand; but the document concerns a camel stamped (κεχαραγμένον) with a σῖμμα or σίγμα, that is, the letter sigma.

⁸⁵ Phot., *Lex.* s.v. See below, at nn. 107-9.

XIII. THE BRANDING OF HUMANS: THE EARLY EVIDENCE

Like tattooing, the branding of humans had more than one function, though the predominant one was penal. This use is found very early. The law code of Hammurabi refers to a slave-mark which is understood to be a brand, and a brand was used in the Neo-Babylonian period.⁸⁶ There is abundant evidence from Pharaonic Egypt.⁸⁷ The practice continued under the Ptolemies, for a royal ordinance of Ptolemy Philadelphus mentions 'sailors with the brand' (τοὺς ναύτας τοὺς τὸν χαρακτήρα ἔχοντας).⁸⁸ The Persians may well have had the same custom, but the only evidence seems to be a story in Curtius Rufus, and it will be seen later that this is doubly unclear.⁸⁹

The evidence for the branding of humans in classical Greece, if the present arguments are accepted, is reduced to one passage, and this too is doubtful. In an isolated line of Eupolis a character asks, 'Will you stamp me with the *trusippion* [a brand placed on broken-down horses] like a horse?' (ἀλλ' ὥσπερ ἵππῳ μούπιβαλεῖς τρυσίππιον;) However, the context may have been metaphorical or farcical, like a scene in Lucian in which philosophers are branded as frauds.⁹⁰

XIV. RELIGIOUS BRANDING

As well as being used for punishment, branding like tattooing could have a religious significance, but seems to have been considered orgiastic and fanatical. The first reference is in the third book of *Maccabees*, where the author affirms that Ptolemy Philopator ordered all his Jewish subjects 'to be registered and stamped (χαράσσεσθαι) by fire on their bodies with the ivy-leaf, the mark of Dionysus'. The same monarch is also said to have had himself branded with various Dionysiac symbols, including the same ivy-leaf; one source, Plutarch, describes these marks as 'stamps' (ἐγχαράξεις), though a Byzantine one uses the verb κατέστιχθαι.⁹¹

The verb καταστίζειν ('dapple', 'mark') also appears in a controversial passage in which Philo refers to the religious branding of idolaters: 'they yearn to enter the service of idols made with hands, confirming it with letters, not (written) in documents (ἐν χαρτιδίῳ) as is customary with slaves, but marking (καταστίζοντες) the letters on their bodies with heated iron so that they remain indelibly'. Because of the prevailing belief that slaves were commonly branded, the text is usually altered so that the word 'but' precedes the phrase 'as is customary with slaves'. However, that would leave the reference to 'documents' curiously isolated, and Dölger defended the text by arguing that they were the agreements which were regularly involved in the sale and purchase of slaves.⁹²

A century after Philo, Lucian anticipates that the Cynic Peregrinus will have priests established in his honour, and that these will employ 'whips or burns or some other such monstrosity' (μαστίγων ἢ καυτηρίων ἢ τινοσ τοιαύτης τερατουργίας); this might mean branding with letters, or merely some form of self-mortification.⁹³ About the same time as Lucian, religious branding is attested in the heretical Christian sect of the Carpocratians, who branded their converts on the right earlobe, sometimes using not a hot iron but a razor or a needle; here all the sources use language which designates the process unambiguously, and avoid *stigma*. As late as the fourth century Prudentius reports that worshippers of Cybele cauterized themselves with red-hot needles, but this author does use the verb *stigmare*.⁹⁴

⁸⁶ G. R. Driver and G. C. Miles, *The Babylonian Laws* (1968) 1. 306-9.

⁸⁷ J. Cerný in *PHibeh* 2, p. 99; W. Helck, *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* 3 (1977), 786-8.

⁸⁸ *PHibeh* 2 no. 198. 86-7, with the excellent discussion of M.-T. Lenger; L. Casson, *TAPA* 97 (1966), 40-1, argues that these are not slaves but conscripts.

⁸⁹ See below, at n. 101.

⁹⁰ Eup. 318 K. On the scene in Lucian see below, at n. 103.

⁹¹ III Macc. 2. 29, Plut., *De adul. et amico* 56E, *Et.*

Magn. s.v. γάλλος, with the discussion of Dölger (1930), 103-4.

⁹² Philo, *De spec. leg.* 1. 58 (vol. 24, p. 44 of the Budé ed., in which Dölger's discussion is not noticed); Dölger (1930), 101 n. 2, pointing to Mitteis, *Chrestomathie*, nos. 267-72.

⁹³ Luc., *Peregr.* 28, with the discussion of Dölger (1929), 70.

⁹⁴ Carpocratians: sources in Dölger (1929), 73-8. Worshippers of Cybele: Prud., *Perist.* 10. 1076-90, on which see Dölger (1929), 66-72.

XV. ROMAN BRANDING: AMBIGUOUS EVIDENCE

With the Romans the evidence for the penal branding of humans is better, but still ambiguous. In Plautus' *Aulularia* two cooks exchange insults: 'What, you, a man of three letters, do you abuse me? Thief!' ('fur'); in a similar scene in the *Casina*, the bailiff Olympio calls the slave Chalinus first a 'runaway' ('fugitiuos') and then 'this literary fellow' ('hic litteratus'). These are clearly inscriptions placed on delinquent slaves; but they are at least as likely to be tattoos as brands, like the inscription with which Bitinna threatened Gastron in Herodas.⁹⁵ Cicero derides the accusers of Roscius of Ameria: 'if I know these people well, that letter of which you are such enemies that you dread every Kalends as well, they will attach it so energetically to your heads ('ad caput adfigent') that hereafter you will not have anyone to blame but yourselves for your misfortunes'. Cicero must be connecting the word *Kalendae*, the first day of the month on which debtors were obliged to pay up, with a mark of the letter K for *kalumniator*, 'false accuser'; but again this could be tattooed as well as branded.⁹⁶ Juvenal and Apuleius refer to convicts in *ergastula* as *inscripti* or *litterati*, but as in Plautus there is no indication of the method; the passages of Petronius and Scribonius Largus already discussed show that such convicts could be tattooed and not necessarily branded.⁹⁷

In Cicero and later authors there arises a new difficulty of language in that they frequently use the verb *inurere* with reference to metaphorical as well as literal marks; thus Cicero calls a building apparently inscribed with the name of Clodius 'branded with letters of blood' ('cruentis inustum litteris').⁹⁸ As a consequence, there are several passages in authors of the imperial period in which this verb may denote actual branding, or only the indelible marks left by tattooing. So also the English 'brand' is sometimes used of tattoos: in the British Army of the nineteenth century 'branding' was the customary term for a process that was certainly tattooing.⁹⁹

This problem is illustrated by the differing versions of a story told about the triumviral period. The earliest and fullest of these versions is given by Valerius Maximus. Antius Restio was saved from death by one of his slaves whom he had 'punished with the penalty of chains and with great disgrace to his features branded with an indelible mark of letters... [so that he was] nothing but the shadow and the image of his own penalty' ('uinculorum poena coercitus inexpiable litterarum nota per summam oris contumeliam inustus, ... nihil quam umbra et imago suppliciorum suorum'). Martial referring to the same incident describes the slave as 'marked on the face' ('fronte notatus'); Cassius Dio tells the same story using the word *στιγματίας* and other derivatives of *στιζειν*; while Macrobius says, 'shackled and with inscribed face' ('compeditus inscripta fronte').¹⁰⁰ Valerius may mean *inustus* literally, but if he is following the same version as Cassius Dio he also may only mean a tattoo.

A passage of Curtius Rufus already mentioned raises a similar problem. Alexander was met outside Persepolis by Greeks whom the Persians had punished in various ways, amputating feet or hands or 'branding them with the marks of barbarian letters' ('inustis barbararum litterarum notis').¹⁰¹ If the story is not fiction, it may refer to branding, but in view of the Persians' known use of tattooing it may refer to that.

Martial resembles the Hellenistic poets in using the metaphor of poetic *stigmata*: 'whatever the heat of my anger brands on you will remain for good and be read throughout the world, and Cinna with his cunning skill will not erase the marks' ('at si quid nostrae tibi bilis inusserit ardor, uiuet et haerebit totoque legetur in orbe, / stigmata nec uafra delebit Cinna arte'). This passage may be evidence both

⁹⁵ Pl., *Aul.* 325-6 (the three letters are obviously FVR), *Cas.* 397, 401.

⁹⁶ Cic., *Rosc. Amer.* 57. For the usual explanation, G. Humbert, *Daremberg-Saglio s.v. Calumnia*, 1. 853 with n. 18; cf. Perdrizet (1911), 89.

⁹⁷ *Juv.* 14. 24, *Apul., Met.* 9. 12. 4 (above, n. 67).

⁹⁸ *OLD, inuro* 3; Cic., *Fam.* 1. 9. 15, with Shackleton Bailey's discussion.

⁹⁹ Burroughs, loc. cit. (above, n. 62).

¹⁰⁰ *Val. Max.* 6. 8. 7; *Mart.* 3. 21; *Cass. Dio* 47. 10. 4-5; *Macr., Sat.* 1. 11. 19-20.

¹⁰¹ *Curt. Ruf.* 5. 5. 6.

for Roman branding and for the already noticed extension of the word *stigma*, but again the verb *inuro* leaves the question open.

XVI. ROMAN BRANDING

It has been argued above that the references to penal branding in the Roman period, from Plautus on, are often ambiguous. I have in fact found only one passage, or rather series of passages, which refers to Roman branding, but even this is hedged around with uncertainties. Photius and the Constantinian excerpts preserve several extracts from Diodorus Siculus' description of the circumstances that led to the slave-rising of about 135 in Sicily. As now preserved, Diodorus characterizes the harshness of Sicilian masters by the marks they put on their slaves, and uses various expressions: 'they placed stamps and marks (χαρακτῆρας καὶ στιγμάς) on their bodies', 'they marked them all with insolent stamps (τοῖς ὑπερηφάνοις χαρακτῆρσι κατέστιζον)', 'stamping them with marks (χαράττοντες τοῖς στιγμασσι)', 'stamping their bodies with marks of iron (στιγμασσι σιδήρου χαράττων)'. Though none of these extracts describes the irons as hot, their language is most naturally taken to refer to branding: if that is right, and they correctly reproduce Diodorus, they provide the earliest evidence not only for this practice in the Roman west, but for the application of the word *stigma* to a brand.¹⁰²

On the other hand, two passages of Lucian that have been cited for the branding of humans in the imperial period cannot be made to bear much weight. In the farcical dialogue called the *Fisherman*, the chief character Parrhesiades is ordered by Philosophy to mark false philosophers by placing *stigmata* on their foreheads or branding them between the brows; but the joke here is that philosophers with their goatees are treated like cattle, and no inference can be drawn about actual practice.¹⁰³ So also in Lucian's *Downward Journey* a cobbler and a tyrant are inspected in the underworld for any marks they may have retained from their previous lives: the cobbler's are called both στιγματα and ἐγκόμματα, and the tyrant is said to be blue from his στιγματα.¹⁰⁴ Again, however, this passage can hardly be cited for the branding of humans, though it does indicate the use of the word *stigma* for brand-marks.

It might be concluded that if *stigma* can be used by extension of branding, then perhaps the evidence for this practice among the Romans is not so exiguous after all. The best that can be said is that from the second century before the Christian era there are numerous passages in Latin literature that may refer to the penal branding of humans, whereas in Greek literature, even of the imperial period, there are almost none.¹⁰⁵ It would not surprise that the Romans felt less repugnance to the practice than at least educated Greeks did; the same contrast of attitudes may be observed with reference to gladiatorial combats, where a sanguinary entertainment borrowed by the Romans from the Etruscans in turn spread to the Greeks, but was resisted by upholders of pure Hellenism such as the Rhodians and travelling moralists.¹⁰⁶

XVII. STIGMA: A SHIFT IN MEANING

It has been shown above that, already in the Roman period, the word *stigma* may sometimes be used of branding. In the Byzantine period tattooing was still commonly practised, as is shown by the discussion in Aetius, but there are also signs that at least the verb στιζεῖν had ceased to be used in this sense, since tattooing is now described by paraphrases, often involving the verb κεντεῖν, 'to prick'. In the early fifth century, Theodoret explains the tattooed letters (γράμματα στικτά) of Leviticus by observing

¹⁰² D.S. 34/35. 2. 1, 2. 27, 2. 32, 2. 36.

¹⁰³ Luc., *Pisc.* 46, cf. 47, 52. For the possibility of a scene of farcical branding in Eupolis, above, at n. 90.

¹⁰⁴ Luc., *Catapl.* 24–8; the inspiration for this passage is of course Pl., *Gorg.* 524E. In a similar imitation of it, Plutarch talks of a person in the

underworld 'full of marks and scars (στιγμάτων καὶ οὐλῶν μεστών)', *De sera num. uind.* 566E.

¹⁰⁵ I discount Diodorus and, for a different reason, Lucian.

¹⁰⁶ L. Robert, *Les Gladiateurs dans l'Orient grec* (1940), 239–63.

that the pagans 'pricked certain parts of their bodies and applied ink' (τινὰ τοῦ σώματος μόρια ἐκέντουν, καὶ μέλαν ἐπέβαλλον); Nicephorus in the tenth similarly paraphrases ἔστιξε in the story of Histiaeus by 'pricked letters with pins and ink' (ἐκέντησεν... γράμματα μετὰ βελονίου καὶ μέλανος); Zonaras describing Theophilus' punishment of idolaters uses στίγμα, but only after a careful description of the process; the scholiast to Aeschines shows similar caution, 'they tattooed their foreheads, that is, they inscribed them' (ἐστίζοντο τὸ μέτωπον, ὃ ἐστὶν ἐπεγράφοντο).¹⁰⁷ Medieval lexica and glossaries explain στίζω and its cognates very variously. The *Suda*, presumably commenting on Herodotus' use of the word στιγεύς, mistranslates it as 'awl' (κεντήριον), and glosses στίγματα as πληγαί, τραύματα ἢ ποικίλματα.¹⁰⁸ The Latin glossaries are similarly vague, favouring translations such as 'marks' (*signa*), 'stamps' (*characteres*), 'scars' (*cicatrices*): one gives 'fiery pricks, that is, signs of injuries' ('igneae puncta, id est, signa plagarum').¹⁰⁹ It has been seen that Photius appears to be the only author who applies στίξαι to the branding of horses.

XVIII. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Greeks and Romans associated decorative tattooing with lesser breeds of barbarians, and never adopted it, whereas in the modern west this is almost its only function. Penal tattooing, whether applied to delinquent slaves, to criminals, or to prisoners of war, was borrowed by the Greeks from the Persians. The Romans in turn borrowed it from the Greeks, and in the later empire extended it to classes virtually indentured to the state, soldiers and manufacturers of arms; it was still practised in the ninth century. Religious tattooing, first found in Egypt and Syria, survived mainly in these same areas throughout antiquity, and has continued among eastern Christians to the present day. For all these types of tattooing, *stigma* was the usual word, except that in the Byzantine period it seems to lose this connotation and had to be explained with paraphrases or glosses.

Branding, a universal practice, was used by the Greeks and Romans mainly on horses (in Egypt, on camels too), and here the usual words were χαρακτήρ or καυτήριον (*nota*). The penal branding of humans was practised by the Babylonians, the Pharaohs, the Ptolemies, and perhaps the Persians; there is no certain example in classical Greece. Though it was probably practised by the Romans the evidence is surprisingly sparse; if the Byzantine extracts of Diodorus can be trusted, he is the first author both to use *stigma* of a brand and to attest to the Roman branding of humans. Religious branding is first heard of under the Ptolemies, when again it is called χαράσσειν; Philo is the first author to refer to it by a word related to *stigma*, καταστίζειν.

In the Middle Ages and up to modern times, penal branding was frequent, whereas tattooing was known as a living tradition only to travellers in the orient or, from the late eighteenth century on, in the south Pacific. Hence it was natural that when medieval and later readers met the word *stigma* in their ancient texts, they should apply it to the only process they knew, that of branding; in addition, one of the clearest ancient texts for tattooing, Herodas, was only published in 1891. It was equally natural that when the word passed into the vernacular languages, it should carry the same connotations, and hence the modern use of it to signify an indelible mark of infamy.¹¹⁰ If the present arguments are correct, however, the word originally and for most of antiquity meant something much less drastic than branding; it may therefore be time to remove something of the stigma from *stigma*.

University of Toronto

¹⁰⁷ Above, at nn. 26, 43, 57.

¹⁰⁸ *Suda* Σ 1103, 1104.

¹⁰⁹ *Corp. Gloss. Lat.* 7. 294 s.v. *Stigma*.

¹¹⁰ Thus Johnson's *Dictionary* s.v.: '1. A brand; a mark with a hot iron. 2. A mark of infamy'; the *OED*:

'1. A mark made upon the skin by burning with a hot iron (rarely, by cutting or pricking), as a token of infamy or subjection; a brand. 2. *fig.* A mark of disgrace or infamy'.