

WERE THE THESSALONIANS “MEDDLING IN DIVINE MATTERS”? A REREADING OF 2 THESSALONIANS 3:11

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Abstract: According to 2 Thess 3:11, some were not working (from ἐργάζομαι) but “meddling” (its compound περιεργάζομαι). The principal lexicons, versions, and secondary literature agree: περιεργάζομαι is a reference to meddling in other people’s business. Because this “horizontal” or “social” interpretation of the verb has so much to commend it, scholars have not given attention to another attested use of the περιεργάζομαι word group, which is prying or trespassing in divine matters. A search for the word group using TLG reveals a broader semantic range, which may be relevant for this text. If the epistle is charging people with trespassing in that which concerns God alone, it might be referring to their calculations of the date of the Day of the Lord.

Key words: Thessalonians, περιεργάζομαι, περίεργος, eschatology, patristics, Judaism

Second Thessalonians 3:11 contains a play on words: some Thessalonians were not “working” (from ἐργάζομαι) but “meddling” (from its compound περιεργάζομαι). While meddling is usually taken to mean “meddling in other people’s business,” there is evidence that it might mean “meddling in divine matters” and therefore is a reference to calculating the time of the Day of the Lord.

I. EPISTOLARY CONTEXT

Μηδὲν ἐργαζομένους ἀλλὰ περιεργαζομένους is a *figura etymologica*, wherein two words with the same root are employed adjacently for effect.¹ Despite claims to the contrary, the specific pairing “not working but meddling” does not seem to have been common—I could locate only two pre-Christian examples—and thus it was not a conventional wordplay which the Thessalonians would have recognized.² No

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¹ BDF §488 classifies *figura etymologica* as a sub-category of paronomasia, whereas E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible: Explained and Illustrated* (New York: Young, 1898), 307, limits paronomasia to rhyming words of different etymological origins.

² Contra Ben Witherington, *1 and 2 Thessalonians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 252; also Béda Rigaux, *Saint Paul: Les Épîtres aux Thessaloniens* (EBib; Paris: Gabalda, 1956), 711. Jeffrey A. D. Weima, *1–2 Thessalonians* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 618–19, argues that it was not a common wordplay. The commonly cited pre-Christian example comes from “Demos-thenes” in the 4th century BCE (the spurious *Philippica* 4.72): He warns that while the State errs by passive inactivity, the individual citizen should not be putting his nose in the affairs of others. He formulates the following notion, as a foil: “It is safe for the State to mind its own business, but dangerous for you if you do not go beyond your fellow-citizens in meddling with affairs [περιεργάσει].” He then refutes it: “Nay, on the contrary, I do foresee the utmost danger, to you from your bustling [ἐργάζει] and meddling [περιεργάζει], but to the State from its inactivity” (Vince ET, Greek text by Butcher). The only

explanation is proffered for the Thessalonians' behavior; we are merely informed that their *praxis* lands them in the category of those who "disorderly" (ἀτάκτως). Opinions vary widely: that they were slothful;³ that they depended on patronage, a view that has gained traction in recent years;⁴ that they laid down their tools because the Day of the Lord had arrived or was imminent;⁵ or that a pseudonymous author was applying the Pauline teaching of 1 Thess 4:10–11 to a later generation, where church workers were beginning to demand pay for their full-time ministry.⁶

II. THE PREVAILING INTERPRETATION OF ΠΕΡΙΕΡΓÁΖΟΜΑΙ: MEDDLING IN OTHER PEOPLE'S BUSINESS

With no dissenting voices, so far as I can determine, commentators take *περιεργάζομαι* to be a reference to *meddling in other people's business*.⁷ They can certainly invoke the lexicons for support: BDAG offers just that one meaning for the verb—"to be intrusively busy, *be a busybody, meddler*." LN has "to meddle in the affairs of someone else – 'to be a busybody.'" LSJ and GE are more nuanced, but neither do they take all the data into account. Here is an abridged version of LSJ:

other that I could find is from T. Gad 6.5: "In a dispute do not let an outsider hear your secrets, since out of hatred for you he may become your enemy, and commit [ἐργάσθαι] a great sin against you. He may talk to you frequently but treacherously, or be much concerned [περιεργάζεται] with you, but for an evil end, having absorbed from you the venom" (Charlesworth). Μὴ ἀκούσῃ ἐν μάχῃ ἀλλότριος μυστήριον ὑμῶν, ἵνα μὴ μισήσας σε ἐχθράνῃ, καὶ μεγάλην ἁμαρτίαν ἐργάσθαι κατὰ σου· ὅτι πολλάκις δολωφωνήσῃ, ἢ περιεργάζεται σε ἐν κακῷ, λαβὼν ἀπὸ σου τὸν ἴον. (Jonge)

³ Charles A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 283–86, speaks of their "irresponsible idleness."

⁴ See Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 341–42; Witherington, *Thessalonians* 247–49; Andrew D. Clarke, *Serve the Community of the Church: Christians as Leaders and Ministers* (First-Century Christians in the Graeco-Roman World; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 200–1; R. Russell, "The Idle in 2 Thess 3:6–12: An Eschatological or a Social Problem?," *NTS* 34 (1988): 105–19; Bruce W. Winter, "If a Man Does not Wish to Work . . .: A Cultural and Historical Setting for 2 Thessalonians 3:6–16," *TynBul* 40 (1989): 303–15; François Bassin, *Les Épîtres de Paul aux Thessaloniciens* (Cherbourg: Edifac, 1991), 268–69.

⁵ Ernest Best, *A Commentary on the First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 334, 340. See also Leon Morris, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 253, 257; G. G. Findlay, *The Epistles of Saint Paul the Apostle to the Thessalonians* (1904; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 210; Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *First and Second Thessalonians* (Int; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 129. Also pp. 23–24 in G. Gotsis and S. Drakopolou Dodd, "Economic Ideas in the Pauline Epistles of the New Testament," *History of Economics Review* 35 (2002): 13–34; James E. Frame, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1912), 307; Rigaux, 701–2; M. J. J. Menken, "Paradise Regained or Still Lost? Eschatology and Disorderly Behavior in 2 Thessalonians," *NTS* 38 (1992): 271–89; M. J. J. Menken, *2 Thessalonians* (London: Routledge, 1994), 129–41; similarly, G. K. Beale, *1–2 Thessalonians* (IVPNTC 13; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 256. Contra Witherington, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 245.

⁶ M. Eugene Boring, *I and II Thessalonians: A Commentary* (NLT; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015), 300–5.

⁷ These include the most recent commentaries: Victor Paul Furnish, *1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians* (ANTC; Nashville: Abingdon, 2007); Weima, *1–2 Thessalonians* (2014); Richard S. Ascough, *1 and 2 Thessalonians: Encountering the Christ Group at Thessalonike* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2014); Boring, *I and II Thessalonians* (2015); Nijay Gupta, *1–2 Thessalonians* (New Covenant Commentary Series; Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2016); Andy Johnson (IHNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016).

LSJ περιεργάζομαι

- (1) *take more pains than enough about a thing, waste one's labour on it*
- (2) transitive, with the accusative, *to be busy about: meddle, interfere with [something, someone]*; absolute (intransitive), *to be a busy-body*
- (3) *bargain, haggle* *περὶ τῆς τιμῆς*
- (4) *in good sense, [to] elaborate*
- (5) *investigate thoroughly; seek diligently*
- (6) *παῦτα π. have this effect, of substances*

Some observations:

- Of these usages, (3), (4), and (6) are not relevant for our study, since they have to do with specific contexts: (3) is price negotiation; (4) oddly, LSJ says this meaning is “in a good sense,” but most of the these texts cited have to do with those who speak in an extravagant, verbose fashion (see, e.g., Herodotus, *Hist.* 3.46.8, where the verb means “to be superfluous”; Aristotle, *Poet.* 1462A, “a minstrel can overdo his gestures” [Halliwell]); these references might better be listed under (1); (6) is a scientific term, found, for example, in Galen.
- While LSJ refers to the “absolute [intransitive] use” of the verb under (2), in point of fact the absolute use shows up under other categories as well: 1, 4, 5.
- Above all, it must be kept in mind that the various cognates—the verb; the noun *περιεργία* (not used in the NT); the adjective *περίεργος* (twice in the NT, in Acts 19:19 and 1 Tim 5:13); and the adverb *περιέργως*—have great semantic overlap; that is, authors such as Plutarch state that a person is doing the verb, and also apply the adjective or the noun to one and the same situation.⁸ See especially in the Appendix #13, and in Philo [#9]—“Is it just to busy yourself in idle labour [*περιεργάσει*] with what is there? And what good can result of all that idle busying? [*τῆς τοσαύτης περιεργίας*]?”

We return to the BDAG definition (“to be intrusively busy, be a busybody, meddler”), which falls within the LSJ entry (2). The various Bible versions follow in the same direction: the NJB (following its French original) has “doing no work themselves but interfering with other people’s” (similarly GNB; GW; in French BFC; also HCSB; ISV; NLT; Reina-Valera 1960 in Spanish; the German NGU-DE has “sich herumtreiben,” knock about, gad). Other translations just use “busybody” or something similar (so ASV, KJV, CEV, CSB, ESV, NASB, NIV, NKJV, NRSV, RSV). That is how the Greek preacher Chrysostom understood the Greek text: “a

⁸ The lexicons give to the antonyms *ἀπεριέργαστος*, *ἀπεριεργία*, and *ἀπερίεργος* the significance of “artless(ness),” but this too is not always correct; for example, Origen [see #21] uses *ἀπερίεργος* with the sense of “not given to curious inquiries.”

person who is not employed and yet is able to work, well, naturally turns into a busybody.”⁹

If this “social meddling” interpretation of *περιεργάζομαι* is correct, then it may lay claim to parallels in Greek, Jewish, and Christian literature. The programmatic denunciation of that vice comes from Plutarch (2nd century CE) in his stilet-to-sharp “On Meddling” (*De curiositate*; its original Greek title is a synonym of *περιεργία*, *Περὶ πολυπραγμοσύνης*). “And now as the accumulation of notions in the head usually begets multiplicity of words ... so the same *curiosity* [*περιεργία*] that is thus inquisitive to know is no less intemperate in talking too, and must needs be as ill-spoken as it is ill-natured.” (*Curios.* 9, Goodwin).

On top of everything else, 2 Thess 3:11 would, in this reading, have a near parallel in 1 Timothy: “[Younger widows] learn to be idle, gadding about from house to house; and they are not merely idle, but also gossips and *busybodies* [the cognate adjective *περιέργοι*], saying what they should not say” (1 Tim 5:13 NRSV).¹⁰ In fact, Pseudo-Clement is confident enough about the connection of the two texts that he conflates them [#25].

To sum up the view that is the majority and perhaps the universal opinion: *περιεργάζομαι* in 2 Thess 3:11 is that sort of meddling in which one person annoys others by taking up their valuable time, prying into others’ business, and causing resentment; it is a *social* or *horizontal* offense. The solution? These boors should get back to work, tend to their own affairs, stay off the church dole (or refuse patronage, or a church salary; see these options above), and stop interrupting decent people.

Nevertheless, there is an alternate understanding of *περιεργάζομαι* that goes past this idea of being a mere busybody. The alternate meaning remains hidden from sight because the English “busybody” *means* one who bothers *other people*, while the Greek verb does not. Thus, the use of “busybody” as a gloss for *περιεργάζομαι* may in fact be misleading.

An alternate understanding of *περιεργάζομαι* also remains hidden from sight because students of 2 Thessalonians rely on BDAG, LSJ, *TDNT*, *NIDNTT*, and *L&N*, and thus will not encounter another usage of the verb. Neither do Thayer or Sophocles, *Greek Lexicon of the Roman and Byzantine Periods*, go beyond the categories found in LSJ. Nevertheless, using TLG, we can expand the semantic range of the word group, and in a direction that provides an intriguing possibility for 2 Thess 3:11.

⁹ Chrysostom, *Second Thessalonians* 5.2 (NPNF³ 13:394), which I paraphrase. His contemporary Ambrosiaster elaborates further: the idle “make themselves welcome in the houses of the rich. They go about quietly collecting stories and opinions, knowing who wants to hear what about whom, so that they will be freely invited to dinner.” Ambrosiaster, *Commentaries on Galatians-Philemon* (trans. Gerald L. Bray; Ancient Christian Texts; Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2009), 118. His interpretation of 1 Tim 5:13 (see our study below) has the same approach (135).

¹⁰ See too the useful study by Jeannine K. Brown, “Just a Busybody? A Look at the Greco-Roman Topos of Meddling for Defining *ἀλλοτριεπίσκοπος* in 1 Peter 4:15,” *JBL* 125 (2006): 549–68; in her analysis of 2 Thess 3:11 she, too, argues that they were “meddling in someone else’s affairs” (553).

III. A NEGLECTED USAGE OF ΠΕΠΙΕΡΓΆΖΟΜΑΙ AND ITS COGNATES: MEDDLING IN GOD’S DOMAIN

LSJ is technically correct with its definition (2) *to be busy about: meddle, interfere with*. Notwithstanding, its editors overlook a sub-definition, references to human beings who are *meddling in matters outside of their allotted place in the universe*. This we may denominate *heavenward* or “*vertical*” trespassing, which infringes on divine matters, or the cosmos, or—in Judaism and Christianity—the domain of the true Creator God. This vertical application appears in Classical and Hellenistic texts; becomes more frequent in Second Temple Judaism (especially Epistle of Aristeas; Sirach; Testament of Issachar; Philo); the Christian references (especially Greek Acts of Andrew; Hippolytus) resemble this special use of the word group as found in Judaism. In the Appendix we provide 26 typical examples, in texts that span eight centuries.

The specific compass of trespassing in the divine (using *περιεργάζομαι* or a cognate) falls into the following, sometimes overlapping, categories.

1. *Vulgar superstition*. When it comes to religion, Plutarch prefers a stripped-down version, free of superstitious humbug [#2]. In another text, even while coping with the death of his daughter, he takes a moment to wish that there will be no nonsense at her funeral, which should be “without ceremony and timorous superstition” [πάσης περιεργίας και δεισιδαιμονίας] (Plutarch, *Cons. ux.* 1, Sieveking text/Goodwin ET).¹¹

2. *Dabbling in magic*. Among others, Irenaeus refers to magical arts with the adjective *περίεργος*.¹² LSJ and BDAG acknowledge that the (substantive) *adjective* can refer to “meddling” in magic; for some reason, LSJ does not mention that the same is true of the *noun* *περιεργία* (BDAG does not contain the noun, since it does not occur within its scope of early Christian literature).¹³ Neither lexicon follows the evidence to a further datum, that the *verb, too*, may mean “to dabble or meddle in magic.”

Here are some examples:

The view of the sophisticated Romans is reflected in an edict contained in a papyrus letter [#3]. “Having found that several persons have suspected they are being cheated by various kinds of divination [μαντείας], I immediately decided, so that no peril should arise because of their folly, to proclaim to all henceforth to refrain from this dangerous meddling [περιεργίας].”¹⁴ That consummate Roman, Augustus, “caused all prophetic books ... to be brought in; and the whole collec-

¹¹ For more on Plutarch, see K. L. Schmidt, “*θηρησκεία*,” in *TDNT* 3:157.

¹² “Thus, then, the mystic priests belonging to this sect [the Simonites] both lead profligate lives and practise magical arts, each one to the extent of his ability. They use exorcisms and incantations. Love-potions, too, and charms, as well as those beings who are called ‘Paredri’ (familiaris) and ‘Oniropompi’ (dream-senders), and whatever other curious arts [περίεργα] can be had recourse to, are eagerly pressed into their service.” Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.23.4 (*ANF* 1:348).

¹³ For its meaning as “magic,” see D. H. Field, “*περιεργάζομαι*,” in *NIDNTT* 1:266–67.

¹⁴ Thanks to the people on the B-Greek forum for their help on this cryptic text, see <https://www.iliblio.org/bgreek/forum/viewtopic.php?f=8&t=3377>.

tion, amounting to upwards of two thousand volumes, he committed to the flames ...” (see Suetonius, *Aug.* 31 in its larger context; Thomson ET). From decades later we read of a book-burning in Ephesus, where they put the torch to costly scrolls; Acts 19:19 provides a perfect illustration of the substantival use of the cognate adjective [#12]: “A number of those who practiced magic [τὰ περιεργα] collected their books and burned them publicly.” The same form is found scattered in a few other places, for example in Hippolytus, *Haer.* 5.6.1.4 (Marcovich text; ANF 5:47)—“I have very elaborately explained the opinions propounded by all the speculators among both Greeks and Barbarians, respecting the Divine Nature and the creation of the world; and not even have I omitted the consideration of their systems of magic [τὰ περιεργα].”

Origen [#21] has sharp words for the would-be exorcist, who “meddles” in demonology: “the man who is curiously inquisitive about the names of demons [τὸν περιεργαζόμενον δαιμόνων ὀνόματα].” He lives in a culture where magicians trade in esoterica, but Origen regards it all as vanity, since God calls humanity to simple obedience rather than speculation.

Along the same line, the Acts of Andrew [#13] contains several examples of the cognate noun and adjective. Andrew makes a convert of Stratocles, brother of Aegeates the governor of Patras, and also of Aegeates’s wife Maximilla. Maximilla forthwith pledges herself to celibacy, which leads the aggrieved Aegeates to crucify the apostle. The worldview of Acts of Andrew is strongly dualistic: Within are the people of God, and without are the devil’s people, blinded, hostile and plagued by demons.¹⁵ Magical meddling is mentioned in two of its vice lists (42.17—“an adversary? a destroyer? an enemy? a cheat? a sorcerer? a corrupted? a man of furtive character? a deceiver? a misanthrope? a hater of the word? one like a tyrant? a boaster? etc.”; also 62.18), plus Andrew warns Maximilla not to succumb to her husband’s “sorcery” (from *γοητεία*, 37.14). In the key passage for our purposes, Andrew exorcises a demon from Stratocles’s slave, a feat that the magicians could not achieve. The language of the Gospel sheds light on the adjective *περιεργος* and the noun *περιεργία*: the sorcerers are meddlesome because of their failed attempt to exorcise the demon; they also meddle in God’s realm. Andrew prays that God not be indulgent with those who trespass in his sphere with their magical formulas.

In the aforementioned examples, a “horizontal” interpretation could possibly be made to fit in #3, where the prefect bans divination because of the damage done to his naïve subjects; but a “vertical” interpretation also makes sense in this text. And with regard to #12 and the second reference in #13 and in #21, the “meddling” clearly denotes a trespassing into *divine* territory, not the aggravation of other people.

3. *Snooping around the mysteries of the cosmos.* [#1] Socrates is “a busybody, investigating the things beneath the earth and in the heavens,” *περιεργάζεται ζητῶν τὰ τε ὑπὸ γῆς καὶ οὐράνια*. It is telling that the adverbial participle *ζητῶν* follows di-

¹⁵ E. Hennecke and W. Schneemelcher, eds., *The New Testament Apocrypha: Writings Relating to the Apostles; Apocalypses and Related Subjects* (rev. ed.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 2:111–12.

rectly upon the verb *περιεργάζομαι*.¹⁶ This could be an instrumental participle, which opens the possibility that he is “nosing around *by* investigating the things beneath the earth and in the heavens.” One proof of his arrogant attitude toward heaven is found later in the text: Socrates in *Apologia Socratis* 19c mentions the play by Aristophanes, *The Clouds*, in which Socrates is made to claim the ability to walk on air.

Philo [#9, #10] rejects the Chaldeans’ investigation of the heavens and planetary movements, how they “busy yourself in idle labour [*περιεργάσει*]” with “idle busying” [*περιεργίας*]; “Quit, then, your meddling [*περιεργίας*] with heavenly concerns.” It is improper to meddle in God’s domain, which is the realm of forbidden knowledge.¹⁷ Hippolytus uses the noun *περιεργία* to confront those who meddle in astrology [#17]. Similarly, in an inscription, the Anatolian god Mēn too would take offense [#4] at “whoever meddles in divine matters or is a busybody” (*περιεργάσῃται*); the exact nature of this breach is not described, but given the parallels it presumably has to do with the magical arts. In another place, Hippolytus [#18] archly states that the teachers of the mystery religions lead on their new initiates until they are “eagerly panting after [lit., “in a *περιεργία*”] the promised disclosure.” The sin is twofold: the initiates are meddling in cosmic mysteries, and their teachers are smug about their own illicit arcane knowledge, dangling the dainties in front of their would-be followers.

4. *Presuming to expound the Scriptures to other people.* While it is not surprising that many Jews and Christians rejected the magical arts, while some also wrote to warn people away from a reckless use of the holy Scriptures. The Greek philosopher Theopompus is a cautionary example of these blundering exegetes, at least in the version told by Letter of Aristeas [#5] and passed along by Josephus [#6].¹⁸ “Just when he was about to quote in a misleading way” from the Law (Let. Aris. 314) he fell into 30 days of “mental upset” (Charlesworth; he was “driven out of his mind,” according to R. H. Charles). Theopompus was not, or so the story goes, a sorcerer,

¹⁶ (Ἐπι)ζητέω, “to investigate,” is sometimes synonymous with the verb *περιεργάζομαι*, see [#11] Eccl 7:30 (29), Symmachus, but not in the OG; also [#21] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 8.61.14; and [#19] Hippolytus, *Commentary on Daniel* 22.1, who uses both verbs: “But why do you waste labor over [or meddle in, pry into, *περιεργάζεσθαι*] times and seek [ἐπι]ζητέω the day of the Lord, when the Savior concealed it from us?” See also [#1].

¹⁷ I am amused by the parallels found in many black-and-white horror and sci-fi movies from the misspent Saturdays of my youth. A regular trope is the scientist who “plays God” and ends up destroying himself. Typical lines are: “he meddled in God’s domain”; “there are things man was not meant to know”; “your feeble mind cannot comprehend what I have seen.” In chapter 4 of Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, the doctor declaims, “Learn from me, if not by my precepts, at least by my example, how dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge, and how much happier that man is who believes his native town to be the world, than he who aspires to become greater than his nature will allow.” See: “These Are Things Man Was Not Meant to Know” (<https://vtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/TheseAreThingsManWasNotMeantToKnow>)

¹⁸ The whole account is obscure and historically unlikely, since it implies the existence of “previously translated passages from the Law,” that is, a pre-Septuagint Greek version and its availability to a non-Jew, before the Hellenization of the Levant. See Sylvie Honigman, *The Septuagint and Homeric Scholarship in Alexandria: A Study in the Narrative of the ‘Letter of Aristeas’* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 60–61; also Jennifer M. Dines, *The Septuagint* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 35.

that is, he was not using Bible texts as part of some magical incantation. Rather, his sins were, first, that he gave a mistaken interpretation of the text (we are not told what it was); second, that he nursed the attitude of “meddlesome desire” (from *περιεργάζομαι*), presuming to do what he should not; third, a man such as he was not authorized to reveal his findings to “common people” (*εἰς κοινούς ἀνθρώπους*). It is not clear what Aristetas means by this latter phrase, since it could have the sense of “common folk” or of “unclean people”; the context favors the latter, because the Word is “holy” (Let. Aris. 313). Demetrius goes on to say that he had received another report, that Theodectes the tragic poet (died 340 BCE) was not allowed by God to adapt a Bible passage within one of his plays (Let. Aris. 316). In Josephus’s version, Theopompus “had been too curious about [*περιεργαζομένων*] divine things.”

Similar to these passages is the statement by Clement of Alexandria [#16], who uses a trope known from other Jewish and Christian apologists: whatever good may be found in the Greek philosophers must have been purloined from the books of Moses, which were written centuries before the Classical age of Greece. Of course, Clement adds, they were not content to leave God’s truth as it stood in the Scriptures; and so, whatever is objectionable about the philosophers’ teaching must have come about by their sophistic meddling [*ὑπὸ περιεργίας*].

5. *Prying too deeply into Scripture or divine truth.* Akin to the category of III.4 is another Jewish and Christian precept: the best attitude to take before God’s truth is a mind which respects the boundary between the “knowable” on the one hand and information which God disallows on the other. If III.4 speaks of the error of revealing divine truth to the *boi polloi*, III.5 addresses those who pry into it too deeply.¹⁹

Therefore Sirach [#7] warns against the meddling and “presumption” of the arrogant. When people go beyond the plain sense of Scripture, ironically, they end up with diminished understanding and they breed evil works: “With matters greater than your affairs do not meddle [*μὴ περιεργάζου*].” In T. Issachar [#8] there is a textual problem; the *lectio difficilior* is to be preferred: he apparently is warning people away from altering the divine law to suit themselves, “tinkering with [*περιεργαζόμεναι*] God’s commands.” That kind of meddling is the opposite of simple obedience, especially of the law to “love the Lord and your neighbor” (T. Iss. 5.2). For his part, the patriarch had led an exemplary life of piety, hard work, chastity, and integrity before God.

We may add to this category the Symmachus version of Eccl 7:30(29) [#11], which version has a sharper edge than do the Hebrew and the Old Greek: “they inquired into curiosity *or* searching after knowledge” [*περιεργάσαντο πολυπραγμοσύνην*]. The Qoheleth had just boasted that he would depend on human investigation in order to understand the world—“I turned my mind to know

¹⁹ It is at this point that another lexicon finally steps in with a few references. G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, turned up two pertinent references, from Alexander of Alexandria [#23] and Cyril of Jerusalem [#24].

and to search out and to seek wisdom and the sum of things, and to know that wickedness is folly and that foolishness is madness” (7:25, NRSV). But in the end his quest turns sour.²⁰ He concludes that while it is true that God made *’ādām* upright in the beginning, humankind then “sought out devices,” that is, clever shortcuts by which they please themselves and evade God’s law.

As in these Jewish sources, some Christians stipulated that the “simple” believer is the one who seeks to understand that which is knowable—no more and no less—and to obey it without demur. And so Origen [#21] rejects the elaborate demonology of the “meddlesome” (above under III.2, pp. 707–8), and lays out the truth that “the man who is simple-minded and not given to curious inquiries [ἀπερίεργος], but in all things devoted to the divine will, will be most pleasing to God.”²¹ This is what the Greek philosophers should have done in the first place, according to his predecessor Clement [see #16]. Christian authors regularly warn their readers, to use the current expression, not to “overthink” God’s truth. The Shepherd tells Hermas [#14] that he should leave off fretting over matters that do not concern him. He posits a threefold theory of Christian knowledge: first is the *known*, “what is in front of you.” Next is a *better understanding of the known*, as a result of praying for intelligence. Finally, are those *things which cannot be known*, which Hermas “cannot see” and hence must leave alone: “do not concern yourself [μὴ περιεργάζου] about the rest.” Cyril of Jerusalem [#24] warns the catechists that they need to pay attention to the lessons of the gospel as they come along in order, and not have “idle curiosity” (περιεργία) about the advanced doctrines that the initiated, the baptized, have learned. “Let none of you enter saying, Let us see what the faithful are doing; let me go in [to where the congregation is meeting] and see, that I may learn what is being done” Cyril uses Simon Magus as the model of people who crave sacred knowledge which they should not possess.

During the Christological controversies, the Fathers rebuked the unorthodox with the same language. Cyril of Alexandria [#26] warns against prying into the ontological nature of God, a path mined with peril. Alexander of Alexandria [#23], too, rails against the Arians: “how then can any one but a madman presume to enquire into [περιεργάσαιτὸ] the nature of the Word of God?” Similarly, Clement of Alexandria [#15] is concerned that those who inquire too deeply into the meaning of the Eucharist will go awry. Cyril and Clement, like Hermas, detect a danger in this transgression—it leads people away from true piety, and causes an itch that can never be scratched. Gregory Thaumaturgus [#22] issues a similar warning, but in this case, he presses his readers to focus on the simple truth of the faith, thus, to avoid the friction that arises when people overcomplicate the Word. It is apropos that Gregory uses Acts 1:7 as an example of snooping into areas that God does not sanction: “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by

²⁰ For more detailed information, see T. Krüger, *Qobeleth: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004), 149.

²¹ Here ἄπλοστος is better translated “not given to inquiry” instead of the lexicons’ advised, “not affected.” Philo commends “a seeking of virtue without pride and without guile, and appearing such aims at virtue in connection with a good reputation and praise from one’s associates.” Philo, *Leg.* 3 (Yonge).

his own authority.” And even more significantly, Hippolytus twice uses the verb [#19, #20] to refer to the practice of calculating eschatological dates, making reference to 1 Thess 5:1–2 (“Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night”) and Acts 1:6–7: People should not mess around with the “times” or seek to know the unknowable, the time of the Day of the Lord. We will have reason to return to these texts in Section 4.

Lastly, the text from Pseudo-Clement [#25] could be a reference to meddling teachers who go from house to house: “under pretence of teaching, they set forth a variety of doctrines.” This text, the remark about Socrates [#1], Acts of Andrew [#13], and T. Issachar [#8] draw attention to a dynamic that is all too well known: that people who uncover new divine mysteries tend to be condescending toward the “uninitiated.”

These ancient references open up the possibility that the Thessalonians were “trespassers” in matters that lay beyond the borders God had set for humanity. This presumptuous act would have distracted them from gainful employment: after all, they were caught up in a higher plane of truth. Their lives were “disorderly,” out of sync with God’s plan, apostolic tradition, and church order. The divine will for them had been manifested in the Pauline model: All Christians should support themselves, even if they fancy themselves special “adepts” in the ways of God.

In Section 2 above, we showed that most English versions, explicitly or no, nudge the reader to a meaning of “social” meddling in the business of others. The more literal translations, which simply offer a version of “meddle” or “meddlesome” could, of course, be interpreted as *meddling in God’s domain*, but that is not how an average reader would understand the English term, particularly when it is translated as “*mere* busybodies” (NRSV), which implies the garden variety of community nuisances.²² Yet there are a few versions that could leave the door open for a different understanding along the lines we have explored:

- The Vulgate renders 3:11 with *curiose agentes*, “they pass their time inquisitively.”
- In Spanish, “sólo se ocupan de lo que no les importa” (Nueva Versión Internacional)—They are “busying themselves in that which does not concern them.”
- Among the commentators, Donfried translates the text as “busy with what does not concern them.”²³

We now link up with 1 Tim 5:13, which sounds so similar to 2 Thess 3:11 that it is possible that the author is reworking its language: οὐ μόνον δὲ ἀργαί ἀλλὰ καὶ φλύαροι καὶ περιεργοί, λαλοῦσαι τὰ μὴ δέοντα, “and they are not merely idle, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not say.” The majority view is that 1 Tim 5:13 uses περιεργος to mean a common busybody, “someone curious to

²² Abraham J. Malherbe, *Letters to the Thessalonians* (AB 32B; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 453.

²³ Karl Paul Donfried, *Paul, Thessalonica, and Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 63.

the point of being a meddler in the business of others.”²⁴ Yet a significant handful of scholars think they spot clues of the existence of magical practices in Ephesus. (1) Folk Magic: Kelly assumes that the widows are going from house to house on pastoral calls and thus may “resort to charms, incantations, and magical formulae in dealing, e.g., with sick people.”²⁵ (2) False Doctrine: The widows spread the doctrine of the errorists, which are probably the same in all three of the Pastoral Epistles. In 2 Tim 3:8 the opponents of Paul are compared to Jannes and Jambres, the magicians in the court of Pharaoh. The author implies the errorists too are *like* magicians, but not literally magicians.

We might suggest a third option: (3) A False Hermeneutic: the false teachers seem to have had a particular technique, using the Scriptures (1 Tim 1:7) or Jewish tradition to uncover mystical arcana and thus create a group of initiates into their “myths and endless genealogies” (see: 1 Tim 1:3–8; 4:7; 6:4–5; 6:20; 2 Tim 2:16; 2:23; 4:4; Titus 1:14; also 3:2; 3:9–10). They upset “whole families” (Titus 1:11), and “creep into households” (2 Tim 3:6). If “capture weak women” in this latter verse is more than simply the stereotyped gender insult of the day, it may reflect a true situation in the church, that women were the particular targets of the errorists. The young widows may have in broad terms “engaged in *some sort of* superstitious practices.”²⁶ Perhaps some of them have embraced the toxic hermeneutic of the Ephesian errorists and meddled into divine mysteries, doors they should never have opened.²⁷ House to house they prattle on about “what they should not say”: in the final analysis, their style is closer to gossip than to wholesome speech.

²⁴ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy* (AYBC 35A; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 267. Also George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles* (NIGNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 227; William Barclay, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* (rev. ed.; DSB; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1975), 127; Gordon D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus* (NIBC; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988), 122; Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 354. Another option is that the women were carrying the doctrine of the heretics from house to house, see I. Howard Marshall and Philip H. Towner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (ICC; rev. ed.; London: T&T Clark, 2004), 603; also William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles* (WBC 46; Dallas: Word, 2000), 293–95. Some have seen in 5:13 a reference to the pastoral visitation done by the younger widows, which broke down into gossip and wasting time; see Martin Dibelius and Hans Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 75; and to some extent, J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (BNTC; London: A. & C. Black, 1963), 118.

²⁵ Kelly, *Commentary*, 118. Similarly, Linda Belleville, “1 Timothy,” in *1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, and Hebrews* (ed. Linda Belleville; Cornerstone Biblical Commentary 17; Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2009), 95; Ceslas Spicq, *Les Épîtres Pastorales* (EBib; Paris: Gabalda, 1947), 172; Jerome D. Quinn and William C. Wacker, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy* (ECC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 444. And of course, see Clinton E. Arnold, *Power and Magic: The Concept of Power in Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 14–20.

²⁶ See A. T. Hanson, *The Pastoral Epistles* (NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 99, italics added.

²⁷ The Pastoral Epistles use metaphors for false teachers and their teaching: “shipwrecks” (1 Tim 1:19); seared consciences (1 Tim 4:2); “gangrene” (2 Tim 2:17); “itching ears” (2 Tim 4:3); “youthful lusts” in 2 Tim 2:22, which on the surface might point to sexual temptations, but which some commentators take as the tendency of the young to squabble over trivialities and to seek novelty (see, e.g., L. T. Johnson, *Letters*, 399).

IV. A POSSIBLE CONTEXT: CALCULATING THE DATE OF THE PAROUSIA

If such a “vertical” application of *περιεργάζομαι* be plausible, it must be asked, what might these Thessalonian disciples have been doing that constituted a trespassing in the sphere of the divine?²⁸

The proximate context is the claim by some that the Day of the Lord was “at hand” or “had arrived” (2:2), a difficult statement, one which I take to mean that the Parousia was impending.²⁹ The result is believers who are “shaken in mind or alarmed.”

Typical of those in any epoch who date the Parousia is a system of arcane reasoning or secret revelation, meddling in matters which don’t concern them.³⁰ Thus, Gregory Thaumaturgus [#22], supplies an excellent example when he condemns those who *περιεργάζομαι* in matters of unfathomable doctrine, and cites one of the eschatological warning texts (Acts 1:7) as proof that there are things we are not meant to know.

Hippolytus [#19] is even more to the point: he fumes in his *Commentary on Daniel* 4.19–23 about those who try to predict the date of the Parousia. As justification for his ire, he points to the story of a 2nd-century man from Pontus who learned through dreams that the Lord would return within a year; his followers stopped working and at the end of that period were left in disarray.

But a certain other man was similarly in Pontus, and he himself governed the church, being a reverent and humble man, though not applying himself unfaithfully to the Scriptures but rather believing dreams which he saw. 19.2. For when a first and second and a third dream happened to him, he began to foretell the future to the brothers as a prophet, “This I saw and this is about to be.” 19.3. And once, having been led astray he said, “Brothers, know that after one year the judgment is about to be.” 19.4. They who heard him who predicted, “The day of the Lord is imminent” [*ἐνέστηκεν ἡ ἡμέρα τοῦ κυρίου*], with weeping and lamenting they begged the Lord night and day holding before their eyes the approaching day of judgment. 19.5. And he led the brothers to such fear and terror so to allow their lands and fields to be desolate, and the wealthy to destroy their possessions. (Hippolytus, *Comm. Dan.* 4.19.1 [Schmidt])

²⁸ See a slightly different interpretation of *περιεργάζομαι* in 2 Thess 3:11. G. S. Shogren, *1–2 Thessalonians* (ZECNT; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 331–35. For a general overview of the passage, see I. Howard Marshall, *1 and 2 Thessalonians* (NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 218–19.

²⁹ With regard to this interpretation of *ἐνέστηκεν ἡ ἡμέρα τοῦ κυρίου* in 2 Thess 2:2, see Shogren, *1–2 Thessalonians*, 275–76; likewise, F. F. Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (WBC 45; Dallas: Word, 1982), 165–66; Green, *Thessalonians*, 305. It is the interpretation that the 2nd-century prophet of Pontus gave to the passage, according to Hippolytus, *Comm. Dan.* 4.19–23.

³⁰ Readers might enjoy my blog post on modern date-setters, some of whom claim fresh revelation and some of whom reject the label of “prophet” in order to—I suspect—avoid condemnation when their predictions do not come about. See “How to Calculate When Jesus will come—without even being a Prophet,” <https://openoureyeslord.com/2015/09/10/how-to-calculate-when-jesus-will-come-without-even-being-a-prophet/>

It is likely that Hippolytus is recounting the story through the lens of 1 Thessalonians 5 and 2 Thessalonians 2–3, since in his telling the movement fulfills those texts just a little too neatly, and the prophet is even made to verbalize 2 Thess 2:2 *verbatim*. Hippolytus also goes on to refer at length to 2 Thess 2:1–9, making the “restrainer” to be the Fourth Beast (i.e., Rome). He alludes to the “times and seasons” reference in 1 Thess 5:1 and asks the readers: “But why do you waste labor [περιεργάζεσθαι] over times and seek the day of the Lord, when the Savior concealed it from us?” (This does not prevent Hippolytus from doing some mathematical calculations of his own). Later in the book, Hippolytus [#20] comments on Dan 12:6, 8, where Daniel wants to know more details about the time of the end. He is rebuffed, says Hippolytus, for the sin of περιεργάζεσθαι, since not even angels can look into such things. As he does in #19, Hippolytus seems to be reading Daniel 12 through the lens of the Christian Scriptures, alluding to Acts 1:6 and 1 Pet 1:10 (“the prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours made careful search and inquiry”), and giving warning to his readers that they too should not pry into God’s hidden truths.

Thus, Gregory and Hippolytus connect the verb form with calendrical calculations of the End; the latter goes so far as to employ it in his exposition of 2 Thessalonians 2. Perhaps the Thessalonians would have been combining their eschatological hope with the sort of snooping found in III.3 (pp. 708–9). Likewise, one might also imagine a Thessalonian who delves too deeply into proving that “the day of the Lord is imminent” (2 Thess 2:2) or even “already here.” He or she quits working, either because worldly occupation is no longer valid, or in order to spread this electrifying new insight.

We should make mention of an alternative to our viewpoint: that some Thessalonians meddled in eschatological doctrine and came up with a *realized, enthusiastic* eschatology. As Mearns states, “we may presume that the giving up of regular work in the case of many Thessalonians probably stemmed from the enthusiastic motive of living in ‘heaven now’ and enjoying a proleptic paradise.”³¹ We must stress, however, that neither Mearns nor anyone else has suggested that the verb περιεργάζομαι itself refers to meddling in eschatology, be it futuristic or realized, but rather annoying one’s neighbors due to their eschatology or a *praxis* that arises from their eschatology: “It is probably not meddlesomeness in their neighbors’

³¹ C. L. Mearns, “Early Eschatological Development in Paul: the evidence of 1 Corinthians,” *JNT* 22 (1984): 23. M. J. J. Menken, “Paradise Regained,” 287, favors a version of this view, in which the proponents of a realized Parousia annoy their fellow Christians with their *doctrine*, also Walter Schmithals, *Paul & the Gnostics* (trans. John E. Steely; Nashville: Abingdon, 1972), 198; Donfried, *Paul, Thessalonians*, 66. Here we might have a parallel in 1 Tim 1:3–4—“instruct certain people not to teach any different doctrine, and not to occupy themselves with myths and endless genealogies that promote speculations” (see also 1 Tim 3:3, 8; 6:5; 2 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:7, 11; Col 2:8; 2 Pet 2:3). It is also possible, of course, that the Ephesian error in the Pastoral Epistles is based on enthusiastic eschatology, that “the resurrection has already taken place” (2 Tim 2:18).

domestic affairs that is meant so much as a misguided interference in their spiritual affairs, and entreaties to prepare for the Great Day.”³²

No, it is better to hew close to the context, where someone, somehow, has determined through some private calculation that the Lord’s return was at hand—an error that the author corrects, not by trying to overturn some system of enthusiastic eschatology, but by clarifying points of the traditional future eschatology. If Hippolytus found *περιεργάζομαι* an apt term for describing “vertical” meddling in *futurist* eschatology by the unnamed man of Pontus, then it is a possibility for 2 Thess 3:11 as well.

V. CONCLUSION

There is clear contemporary attestation of the verb *περιεργάζομαι* as “meddling in the divine realm.” We have suggested, based in part on fresh TLG searches, that such a “vertical” meaning of *περιεργάζομαι* is possible in 2 Thess 3:11, and may express the author’s judgment that some Thessalonians were busying themselves in God’s domain, where they did not belong. Since the author does not explicitly root the action to joblessness or social meddling, the text leaves open this other possibility of their inquiring in the apocalyptic mysteries, perhaps to the point of setting dates for the Day of the Lord in 2:1–2. Hence a possible meaning:

For we hear that some are living disorderly among you. These people are not busy at work; they are busy prying into God’s own matters. They should get back to their daily work and earn their own bread.

APPENDIX: ΠΕΡΙΕΡΓΑΖΟΜΑΙ AND COGNATES AS “MEDDLING IN DIVINE AFFAIRS”

CLASSICAL AND HELLENISTIC TEXTS:

#1. Plato, *Apologia Socratis* 19b–c (mid-4th century BCE; verb)—“Socrates is a criminal and a busybody, investigating the things beneath the earth and in the heavens and making the weaker argument stronger and teaching others these same things.” *Σωκράτης ἀδικεῖ καὶ περιεργάζεται ζητῶν τὰ τε ὑπὸ γῆς καὶ οὐράνια καὶ τὸν ἥττω λόγον κρείττω ποιῶν καὶ ἄλλους ταῦτά ταῦτα διδάσκων*” (text: Stephanus; ET: Lamb)

#2. Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride* 3 (early 2nd century CE; noun)—“the sacred doctrine about the Gods, cleansed from superstitious frights and vain curiosities” [*καὶ περιεργίας*] (text: Bernardakis; ET: Goodwin)

#3. Papyrus letter (198 CE; noun)—*ἐντυχῶν πολλοῖς οἰηθεῖσιν μαντείας τρόποις ἐξαπατάσθαι εὐθέως ἀναγκαῖον ἡγησάμην περὶ τοῦ μηδένα κίνδυνον τῆ ἀνοίᾳ αὐτῶν ἐπακολουθῆσαι σαφῶς πᾶσιν ἐνταῦθα διαγορευσαί εἶργεσθαι τῆς ἐπισφαλοῦς ταύτης περιεργίας.* (P. Coll. Youtie 1.30). The Roman prefect of Egypt

³² William Neil, *The Epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians* (MNTC; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1950), 194.

connects “this dangerous meddling” in magic with mantic divinations. “Having found that several persons have suspected they are being cheated by various kinds of divination [μαντείας], I immediately decided, so that no peril should arise because of their folly, to proclaim to all henceforth to refrain from this dangerous meddling [περιεργίας].”

#4. An inscription concerning Mēn, moon god of W. Anatolia (2nd–3rd century CE; verb) —“Whoever meddles in divine matters or is a busybody, let him be guilty of sin against the sovereign Mēn.” ὅς ἂν δὲ πολυπραγμονήσῃ τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ ἢ περιεργάσῃται, ἀμαρτίαν ὀφίλετω Μηνί Τυράννωι. (MM 505. *Syll* 633 [= 31042]¹⁵; my translation).

JEWISH TEXTS:

#5. Letter of Aristean 315 (3rd–1st century BCE; verb)— “It was revealed to [Theopompus] in a dream that it was due to his meddlesome desire to disclose the things of God to common man ...” ὅτι τὰ θεῖα βούλεται περιεργασάμενος εἰς κοινούς ἀνθρώπους ἐκφέρειν (text: Penner; ET: Charlesworth). Another version of the Theopompus story is found in Josephus, who borrowed it from *Aristean*:

#6. Josephus, *Antiquities* 12.2.14 (§111–112) (90s CE; verb)—Theopompus “learned from a dream that this misfortune had befallen him because he had been too curious about divine things [in context, the Torah] and wished to disclose them to common men ...” τοῦτ’ αὐτῷ συμβαίη περιεργαζομένῳ τὰ θεῖα ... ἐκφέρειν εἰς κοινούς ἀνθρώπους (text: Niese; ET: Thackeray, LCL)

#7. Sirach 3:22–24 (c. 180 BCE; verb)— “The things that have been prescribed for you, think about these, for you have no need of hidden matters. With matters greater than your affairs do not meddle [μὴ περιεργάζου], for things beyond human understanding have [already] been shown to you. For their presumption has led many astray, and their evil fancy has diminished their understanding.” (text: Göttingen; ET: NETS)

#8. Testament of Issachar 5.1–2 (2nd–1st century BCE; verb)—“Keep the Law of God, my children; achieve integrity; live without malice, not tinkering with God’s commands or your neighbor’s affairs” (Charlesworth). The Charlesworth version is based on the Greek text by Jonge: καὶ ἐν ἀκακία πορεύσθε, μὴ περιεργαζόμεναι ἐντολὰς κυρίου καὶ τοῦ πλησίον τὰς πράξεις. An alternate Greek text omits the words ἐντολὰς Κυρίου, καί, likely via a scribal smoothing of a puzzling text: “Not playing the busybody with the business of your neighbor” (Charles, based on the shorter text).

#9. Philo, *Names* 72 (1st century CE; verb, noun)—“For what purpose, [God] asks, do you investigate the rhythmic movements and revolutions of the stars? Why this great leap from earth up to the realm of ether? Is it just to busy yourself in idle labour [περιεργάσῃ] with what is there? And what good can result of all that idle busying? [τῆς τοσαύτης περιεργίας]?” (text: Wendland; ET: Colson and Whitaker, LCL)

#10. Philo, *Migration* 187 (1st century CE; noun)—“Quit, then, your meddling [περιεργίας] with heavenly concerns, and take up your abode, as I have said, in

yourselves; leave behind you opinion [*σὺ*], the country of the Chaldeans, and migrate to Haran, the place of sense-perception, which is understanding's bodily tenement." (text: Wendland; ET: Colson and Whitaker, LCL)

#11. Ecclesiastes 7:30(29) Symmachus version (2nd century CE; verb)—“they inquired into curiosity [*ἢ* searching after knowledge].” *περιεργάσαντο πολυπραγμοσύνην* (Symmachus text from the Hexapla, my paraphrase). The LXX has “they sought out many reasonings.” *αὐτοὶ ἐζήτησαν λογισμοὺς πολλοὺς* (Göttingen text; my translation), alternatively “they have searched out many schemes” (NETS LXX).

CHRISTIAN TEXTS:

#12. Acts 19:19 (1st century CE; adjective)—“A number of those who practiced magic [*τὰ περιεργα*] collected their books and burned them publicly.” (NA²⁸ text/NRSV)

#13. Greek Acts of Andrew (mid-2nd century CE; adjective; elsewhere he uses the noun)—Andrew declares: “Magicians [*μάγοι*] have taken their stand, unable to do anything, who also have given the slave up for lost, and others whom we all in common see as meddlesome [*περιεργους*] because they have not been able to drive out this terrible demon from the unhappy slave ...” Andrew then prays: “O God who does not hearken to the magicians [*μάγοις*], God who does not yield himself to the meddlesome [*περιεργοις*].” Andrew then drives out the demon. (text: Prieur, 4–5; ET: Hennecke and Schneemelcher, 2:136).

#14. Shepherd of Hermas, *Parables* 9.2.6–7 (mid-2nd century CE; verb)—“And the shepherd said to me, ‘Why are you debating with yourself and becoming perplexed, and troubling yourself? Do not attempt, as though you were intelligent, to understand things you cannot comprehend, but ask the Lord that you may receive the intelligence to understand them. You are not able to see things behind you, but you do see what is in front of you. Let what you cannot see alone, and do not trouble yourself about it; but master those things that you do see, and do not concern yourself [*μὴ περιεργάζου*] about the rest.’” (text and ET: Holmes)

#15. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 1.1.6 (late 2nd century CE; noun)—“In the same way, therefore, those who take part in the divine words [that is, the divine elements of the Eucharist], ought to guard against betaking themselves to this, as they would to the building of cities, to examine them [*ἱστορήσοντες*] out of curiosity [ablative of *περιεργίας*]; that they do not come to the task for the sake of receiving worldly things, having ascertained that they who are consecrated to Christ are given to communicate the necessities of life.” (text: Früchtel; ET: ANF 2:300)

#16. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 1.17.87 (late 2nd century CE; noun)—the philosophers stole all their good ideas from the OT, “and claimed these as their own teachings, disguising some points, treating others sophistically by their ingenuity [*ὑπὸ περιεργίας*], and discovering other things, for perchance they had ‘the spirit of perception.’” (text: Früchtel; ET: ANF 2:320)

#17. Hippolytus, *Refutation* 6.50 (early 3rd century CE; noun)—calls astrology a “meddling” [*περιεργία*] (ANF has “over-spun theories”). He also speaks of as-

trology (6.55.2 in the Marcovich Greek text/6.50 in *ANF* 5:99); also Chaldean “curiosity” [περιεργία] in astrology (10.5 in Marcovich text/10.1 in *ANF* 5:140)

#18. Hippolytus, *Refutation* prol. 3 (early 3rd century CE; noun)—teachers of the mystery religions lead on their new initiates until they are “eagerly panting after [lit., in a περιεργία] the promised disclosure.” (1.prologue.3.1 in Marcovich text/*ANF* 5:10)

#19. Hippolytus, *Commentary on Daniel* 4.22.1 (early 3rd century CE; verb)—“But why do you waste labor over [or meddle in, pry into] times and seek the day of the Lord, when the Savior concealed it from us? Tell me, if you know the date of your departure, why do you interfere with the consummation of all the world?” Τί δέ σοι καὶ τοὺς χρόνους περιεργάζεσθαι καὶ τὴν ἡμέραν ἐπιζητεῖν, ὅποτε ἀπέκρυψεν ἀφ’ ἡμῶν ταύτην ὁ σωτῆρ; (text: Lefèvre; ET: Schmidt)

#20. Hippolytus, *Commentary on Daniel* 58.1 (early 3rd century CE; verb)—“After these things were spoken in this way, the prophet, wishing to more precisely investigate [or better, *pry into*] what would be the kind of *things which would happen* after the resurrection, he answered him and said, ‘Lord what *will be* the end of these?’” [Dan 12:6]. Τούτων οὕτως εἰρημένων, βουλόμενος ὁ προφήτης ἀκριβέστερον περιεργάζεσθαι ὅποια ἦν τὰ μετὰ τὴν ἀνάστασιν, ἀπεκρίθη πρὸς αὐτὸν καὶ εἶπεν· Κύριε, τί τὰ ἔσχατα τούτων; (text: Lefèvre, 4.59.2; ET: Schmidt).

#21. Origen, *Contra Celsum* 8.61.5–6 (mid-3rd century CE; verb)—“the man who is curiously inquisitive about the names of demons [τὸν περιεργαζόμενον δαιμόνων ὀνόματα], their powers and agency, the incantations, the herbs proper to them, and the stones with the inscriptions graven on them, corresponding symbolically or otherwise to their traditional shapes”; 8.61.14—“It is plain even to the least intelligent, that the disposition of the man who is [sincere], and not given to curious inquiries [cognate ἀπερίεργον], but in all things devoted to the divine will, will be most pleasing to God, and to all those who are like God; but that of the man who, for the sake of bodily health, of bodily enjoyment, and outward prosperity, busies himself about the names of demons [περιεργαζόμενον δαιμόνων ὀνόματα], and inquires [ζητοῦν] by what incantations he shall appease them, will be condemned by God as bad and impious, and more agreeable to the nature of demons than of men, and will be given over to be torn and otherwise tormented by demons.” (text: Borret; ET: *ANF* 4:662)

#22. Gregory Thaumaturgus, *De fide* 12 (3rd century CE; verb)—With regard to the mystery of the incarnation, “let us not intermeddle with the word of the Gospel [καὶ μὴ περιεργαζόμεθα τὸν εὐαγγελικὸν λόγον] by lifeless disputations, scattering about endless questionings and logomachies [disputes about words], and making a hard thing of the gentle and simple word of faith; but rather let us work the work of faith, let us love peace, let us exhibit concord, let us preserve unity, let us cultivate love, with which God is well pleased.” He goes on to use Acts 1:7 as an example of our ignorance: “it is not for us to know the times or the seasons which the Father hath put in His own power.” (Casson partially reconstructs the Greek text; ET: *ANF* 6:52)

#23. Alexander of Alexandria, *Epistula ad Alexandrum Constantinopolitanum* (4th century CE; verb). “For if the knowledge of many other things incomparably infe-

rior is beyond the capacity of the human mind, and cannot therefore be attained ... how then can any one but a madman presume to enquire into the nature [hypostasis] of the Word of God [Logos]?" πῶς ἂν περιεργάσαιτό τις τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ λόγου ὑπόστασιν (quoted in Theodoret, *Hist. eocl.* 1.3, text: Parmentier and Scheidweiler; ET: *NPNI*² 3:36)

#24. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Procatechesis* 4 (4th century CE; noun). "Let there be no Simon [Magus] among you, no hypocrisy, no idle curiosity about the matter." Μηδεὶς ἐν ὑμῖν Σίμων, μηδεμία ὑπόκρισις, μηδὲ περιεργία τοῦ πράγματος. (text: Reischl and Rupp; ET: *NPNI*² 7:1)

#25. Pseudo-Clementine *Epistle concerning virginity* 1.11 (4th century CE?; verb). The text is extant in the Syriac, but there are Greek fragments in which the author uses the verb περιεργάζομαι. Clement links the two key passages from 2 Thess 3:11 and 1 Tim 5:13—"Such are the ways of all those who do not work, but go hunting for tales [τοιιοῦτοί εἰσιν οἱ μηδὲν ἐργαζόμενοι, ἀλλὰ περιεργαζόμενοι καταλαλοῦντες], and think to themselves that this is profitable and right. For such persons are like those idle and prating widows 'who go wandering about among houses' with their prating, and hunt for idle tales, and carry them from house to house with much exaggeration, without fear of God" (text: Diekamp and Funk; ET: *ANF* 8:58)

#26. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on John* 2.8 (5th century CE; verb)—"we will glorify the Only-Begotten together with God the Father, not with any difference, but in equality of honour and glory, as God of God, and Light of Light, and Life of Life. And overmuch enquiry into what is to be received as faith [καὶ περιεργάζεσθαι μὲν τὸ πίστει παραδεκτόν], is not without hazard ..." (text: Pusey; ET: Pusey, *LFC* 43, 2.26)