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URBAN RELIGION IN ROMAN CORINTH: INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES
A REVIEW ARTICLE

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The essays in *Urban Religion in Roman Corinth: Interdisciplinary Approaches* provide the reader with a work of context, orientation, and insight into the religious world of Roman Corinth and Paul's Corinthian correspondence. These essays were originally presented in a conference at Harvard Divinity School entitled "Urban Religion in Roman Corinth" thus the name of the book, as well. This book provides almost fifty pages of bibliography that represents some of the best in interdisciplinary research material presently available. It also includes five maps in the back of the book that are most useful as the various aspects of the study unfold. The index is helpful for topics covered; however, it lacks entries for modern authors that would make it more useful as a reference book. That aside, this book, which follows in the steps of its predecessors *Ephesos: Metropolis of Asia* and *Pergamon: Citadel of the Gods*, is an advanced

introduction to the history, topography, urban development, and religious practices of this vital Greco-Roman city.

Guy Sanders, the director of the American School of Classical Studies' Excavations at Corinth since 1997, expertly surveys the geography, history of excavations, and the development of the urban areas of Roman Corinth. He provides particularly interesting information geographical details of the city and also mentions the work of Ambraseys as a key corrective concerning seismic activity in the history of Corinth. His reference to *Good Will Hunting* as a metaphor for understanding the importance of graph theory adds to the enjoyment of the reading experience. His section on the history of excavations provides a quick overview of the archaeological work that has been done at Corinth, however, one would be wise to have *Corinth 20: The Centenary, 1896-1996* edited by Charles K Williams II and Nancy Bookidis close by to be able to reference as Sanders points to this work eight times in the chapter, Schowalter acknowledges the importance of this work as a dialog partner in this study and points out that *Urban Religion in Roman Corinth* provides clarity to some of this issues raised in *Corinth 20*. His section on the urban areas follows closely the work of Charles K. Williams and he mentions the scholarly debate concerning the location of the agora and suggests the north location as the best option. He briefly mentions the Julian Basilica and argues for a significant civic role for this structure, a view that has been reinforced with the identification of two new fragments by Paul D. Scotton, who argues for an imperial presence in the Julian Basilica (*Hesperia*, 74/1 (Jan-Mar 2005) 95-100). He acknowledges the debate over Temple E, as to whether it was dedicated to Zeus or

Octavia. He mentions in passing two data that interest those who study Paul's travels: the rosta or bema (Acts 18:12) and the Erastus inscription (Romans 16:23).

David Gilman Romano argues for three discernable periods of urban and rural planning in Roman Corinth (Interim Period 146 B.C.E. – 44 B.C.E.; Caesarian Corinth 44 B.C.E. – 70s C.E.; Flavian Colony in 70s). This chapter summarizes many of the findings of the Corinth Computer Project of the University of Pennsylvania, including several drawings that orient the reader to the various plans of the city. The historical introduction notes that with the sacking of Corinth by Mummius in 146 B.C.E. “Corinth was deprived of its civic and political identity.” (26) This understanding is supported by the description of Corinth as Roman Corinth throughout this book. In the interim period he notes some development along the lines of the previous Greek roads and the use of the Greek circuit wall. The Caesarian period receives significant attention in this chapter, in which he argues *Colonia Laus Iulia Corinthiensis* followed plans similar to other Roman colonies during the period. In his discussion of the Flavian period Romano takes time to address one of his most ardent critics, Mary E. Hoskins Walbank. Romano offers a brief response to her challenges of his methodology and interpretations and suggests she has criticized him without being fully aware of the methodological issues present in the debate. One other interesting note in this chapter is his contention that many of the new colonists during this period may have been captives from the Jewish revolt in Palestine. These individuals may have served as workers for Nero's canal project.

L. Michael White argues that the Southeast Building perpendicular to the South Stoa and text to the Julian Basilica is the location for Favorinus's speech *Korinthiakos*, (traditionally referred to as *Oration 37* of Dio Chrysostom), criticizing the Corinthians

for removing his bronze statue from the front of the library after he fell into disrepute in Rome during the reign of Hadrian. White does a good job showing how archaeological evidence can be used to reconstruct a social setting for a literary work in antiquity. Many may not agree with his conclusion, however, he sustains his argument quite well, while at the same time, providing a possible solution to the location of the library at Corinth, a longstanding and open question among archaeologists. This chapter supplies the reader with primary source material, both literary and inscriptional. He engages in a textual critique of Crosby's LCL translation of Favorinus's speech and provides an ingenious rhetorical analysis which makes his textual emendations seem more probable. He mentions, in passing, the similarities between Favorinus's speech and Paul's rhetoric in Galatians, as well as, noting how Favorinus's rejection parallels the rejection of Paul, and Paul's self-defense, in 2 Corinthians.

Betsey Robinson provides an archaeological evaluation of the Peirene and Glauke fountains. She is interested in how these fountains formed the collective identity of the inhabitants of Roman Corinth. The fountain of Peirene serves as the primary example of an object displaying Roman characteristics while maintaining its Greek ethos. Robinson argues for the mythological connection of the Peirene fountain with Bellerophon's breaking of Pegasus with the help of Athena. The mythological ethos of the Glauke fountain is determined to lack credible support as it is presented by Pausanias; it did, however, serve as a memorial for the story of Medea's children. How did these two fountains help to form the cultural identity of Roman Corinth? They connected the residents of the newly formed Roman colony with Corinth's legendary past. Robinson suggests the Roman builders took advantage of these well-known stories and

incorporated these traditions into the newly developed city. These monuments reminded the citizens of Roman Corinth of the Greek past of this city and stimulated the imagination of these individuals, as well as, individuals who traveled through this important and newly formed Roman colony.

Nancy Bookidis provides a summary of the various levels of religious practices occurring in the early Roman Corinth period (146 B.C.E. to 100 C.E.). She provides evidence for change and continuity between the Greek and Roman eras for the colony. She convincingly argues that when scholars refer to Roman Corinth they should also keep in mind that the religious history of Old Corinth still impacts the newly formed Roman colony. The forum served as the center of religious life in the colony centered on the imperial cult, while the religious expressions with Hellenistic roots were moved to the periphery of the city. An example of this is the cult of Melikertes-Palaimon which Elizebeth R. Gebhard describes. She sharpens her argument for the Greek origin of Melikertes-Palaimon veneration made in “Melikertes-Palaimon, hero of the Isthmian games,” published in Robin Hägg’s, *Ancient Greek Hero Cult*. In the current chapter, Pindar does not play as central of role to her argument as it did in the previous work, rather Gebhard analyzes the archaeological evidence for clues to the rites of Melikertes-Palaimon that were re-established in Roman Corinth (the pictures, reconstructions, and maps in this chapter are most helpful in conceptualizing her argument), such as the celebration of the funeral rites of Melikertes, including the *thrēnos*, the procession to the tomb, and the song associated with Isthmian festival. The development of the subterranean chamber and Gebhard’s interpretation of its use provides the strongest evidence from the material remains for her reconstruction; however, some may find her

interpretation unpersuasive. The reconstruction of the pit and the material remains surrounding it, appear to be consistent with her interpretation and also serve as an important connecting point with the development of the new rituals associated, perhaps with the mystery cults that contributed to the Roman assimilation of the Melikertes-Palaimon rites that existed prior to 146 B.C.E. and served as an example of the re-affirmation of the religious traditions of Old Corinth. Thus, both Bookidis and Gebhard make convincing arguments for seeing continuity and change between the Greek and Roman religious expressions in Corinth.

When many people think about the religious expression of the people in Corinth, they normally think of one thing: the temple prostitutes of the Aphrodite cult on the Acrocorinth, John Lanci challenges commonly held assumptions on this topic and argues for an undomesticated goddess whose women, at least initially, were more interested in warfare than sex. Lanci sets out to deconstruct the scholarly understanding of Aphrodite as a goddess of love who, at Corinth, was honored, at one point by 1,000 temple prostitutes. He argues, that *qadištu* and the *qdš* root in Semitic usage in the ancient Near East may be associated with cultic activity and sacred status, however, the concept of a sacred or temple prostitute is not in view, in these words, in the literature of the ancient Near East. Allusions to this activity in the Hebrew Bible are explained by confusing factual references with metaphors and the misunderstanding of *hieros gamos* or sacred marriage and its connections with fertility. He also suggests that circular reasoning may be cause of the scholarly construction of sacred prostitution in the ancient Near East. In the Greek writings similar problems are associated with *hetaira* and *hierodouloi*. He argues that “companions” or “sacred slaves” do not necessarily require a sexual

component in the contexts in which these words are used. He considers Strabo to be the reason many scholars connect Aphrodite and sacred prostitution. Lanci points out that Strabo relies on Herodotus, a writer who should not be relied on for otherwise unsubstantiated historical information. The last line of argument against the existence of temple prostitutes in Corinth relies on results from ritual studies. He challenges scholars to describe the religious significance, intended communal benefit, and mythic meaning that would underlie sacred prostitution at Corinth. He concludes there is none, even though he mentions a need for further study in this area would be help, especially as it relates to the statue of the goddess. He notes that there may be a gender-driven agenda that sought to domestic Aphrodite and concludes that the original myth attached to Corinth and Aphrodite related to praying for the men to be successful in war not in love-making. Thus, the theoretical framework for interpreting the role Aphrodite worship playing in general should be reconsidered, at theme that Charles K. Williams II discusses in the next chapter.

Williams provides a catalog of finds from buildings 1, 3, 5, and 7 and the surrounding areas east of the theatre. He provides ample evidence concerning the religious experience of those living in Corinth with the majority of the finds being associated with Aphrodite. He provides line drawings, pictures, and reconstructions that make this chapter particularly helpful for an orientation to the religious expressions found in the archaeology of Roman Corinth (even an example of a dog rattle). Even though there is significant evidence for Aphrodite worship in Corinth he is not convinced that temple prostitution occurred on the Acrocorinth. Here he is in agreement with Lanci, however, he is more open to sacred prostitution occurring during the pre-Roman period

but he connects it with fecundity and not ritual lustration. He does offer evidence for abrupt destruction (i.e., earthquake) of some of the remains. He suggests that, in the main, the worship of Aphrodite slowly diminished in importance, as evidence by, for example, earthen vessels of poor quality being used for the cult. He does, however, argue for a significant increase in the destruction of the buildings and accoutrements of the cult that may be related to over-zealous Christians in the last quarter of the third century. One helpful corrective that Williams weaves throughout his chapter is the need to allow the religious expression at Corinth to 'stand on its own' as a religion used by the Roman Corinthians to make sense of their world.

Mary E. Hoskins Walbank provides insight into the burial practices of the ordinary Roman Corinthian and how these practices demonstrate religious belief. Walbank's survey is restricted to the graves along the irrigation channel north of the city. The graves are unsubstantial and support the contention that they belonged to ordinary citizens, with the exception of the Painted Tomb which contains a number of unique finds, as compared to the other burial sites in this area. The Painted Tomb, for example, contained a fresco of a pygmy that Walbank argues detailed a scene to ward off the Evil Eye. The floor of the chamber also evidences the re-use of an inscription that originally was used as a tombstone that described the person as a pagan. The preferred Roman practice for burial was cremation, while inhumation was the preferred Greek practice, however, in keeping with the general ethos of Roman Corinth, there is a combination of both practices, as well as, an indication that secondary burials also occurred. The identity issues that impacted Roman Corinth continued into the burial rites, Walbank sees evidence of certain objects that were placed with the deceased as serving as status-

markers for the individual and their family within the broader community. One interesting result from Walbank's work was the absence of Christian burials in the area. She notes that there is evidence for distinctly Christian symbolism in the burials in other areas of Corinth, however, she is not surprised by this because Christians would not be interested in drawing undue attention to themselves and, more importantly, she argues they incorporated "non-Christian burial rites" (279) into their practice. Therefore, one would not expect to be able to discern uniquely Christian symbols in all the burials in the area. Walbank reminds her readers that many of the conclusions are tentative and require a full comparison with the other burial finds in Roman Corinth, which will be done with the publication of a volume in the Corinth Series she is writing with Kathleen Slane.

Christine M. Thomas compares the funeral practices in Roman Corinth and Ephesos. Thomas begins by noting the social stratification that occurs in these two cities reflects their relationship with Rome and specifically with the freedmen and the provincial ruling class. Walbank noted that the north cemetery remains in Corinth were indicative of ordinary citizens; however, Thomas argues that the unostentatious appearance of the sarcophagi relate to the social and civic stability in Corinth, a stability that was lacking in the provincial capital of Asia Minor, Ephesos. This lack of stability led them to engage in "style wars" in which the ossuaries became status symbols, richly ornamented with garlands, irregardless of whether the deceased actually attained such as high status in life. The differences in Corinth and Ephesos in their funeral practices argue for differing approaches to the negotiating of group identity. These burial practices serve as rituals that establish group boundaries. Therefore, Thomas argues the boundaries were rather stable in Corinth where Roman citizenship and civic leadership was less of an issue

than in Ephesos where the presence of freedmen and the provincial ruling class created class distinctions that led to the blurring of identity boundaries. Thomas provides a convincing argument for the rise of cremation during the Late Republican and Early Roman Imperial periods that was based on social and political issues more than a religious outlook based on inhumation, in where the deceased is considered to be existing in the grave; or cremation with its connotation of immortality and the freeing the spirit. Thomas conceives of the process of the changes in the funeral rites as primarily as result of political and social issues and only secondarily as a religious issue.

Margaret M. Mitchell turns her scholarly creativity and insight to the challenging question of the partition theory and how it is applied to 2 Corinthians. Mitchell's recent work in rhetorical analysis of 1 Corinthians has led her to conclude that it is a single unit described as deliberative rhetoric. Her work in 1 Corinthians has ended most discussion of the need for a partition theory for 1 Corinthians. She, however, sees a need for a restructuring of the proposed partitions for 2 Corinthians. The primary strength of her work in this essay is the consistent application of literary and historical criticism which provides the foundation for her textual and historical reconstruction of the Corinthian correspondence, which is treated like archaeological data throughout the essay. The unique contribution to the debate is her contention that 2 Corinthians 8 should be placed of 1 Corinthians and before 2 Corinthians 2:14-7:4 (minus 6:14-7:1). Based on her rather convincing reconstruction of Paul's correspondence she supplies the reader with a plausible sequence of events that allow for both archaeological and history-of-religion reflection; however, she does not supply an historical reconstruction for the collection and redaction of these letters, a fact that non-partition scholars are always quick to point

out. She does, however, recognize the need for further development of this reconstruction and points the reader to her essay “The Corinthian Correspondence and the Birth of Pauline Hermeneutics.” To support both archaeological and history-of-religion endeavors, she concludes her essay with seven lines of research that interdisciplinary scholars are obliged to engage based on her reconstruction of the Corinthian correspondence. Mitchell is also sensitive to identity issues in the Corinthian correspondence both “identity transfer” (311) and “identity politics” (338) are mentioned and serve as complex sociological phenomenon that led to many of the conflicts between Paul and some of believers in Corinth. Mitchell’s essay will probably convince a few scholars, while others will continue to argue for the essential unity of 2 Corinthians, with the possible exception of 2 Corinthians 1-9 and 10-13 that a number of conservative scholars are inclined to consider (i.e., Fredrick J. Long and Ben Witherington). Either way, Mitchell’s essay serves as an excellent example of interdisciplinary research and the type of results it can produce.

Helmut Koester’s article catalogs what one can know about Paul and the *ekklēsia* from the literary and archaeological evidence. Koester’s approach is standard in Pauline studies, he understands Acts to be most unhelpful for historical information, however, he accepts the reference to Gallio to be helpful for chronology, as well as, Paul’s work as a tentmaker. The references to Crispus, Aquila, and Priscilla are understood as historical persons, however, beyond that Acts 18 is not helpful. He affirms the historical and archaeological identification of Erastus (Romans 16:23) and the inscription that refers to him near the theater in Corinth while rejecting the “Synagogue of the Hebrews” inscription, primarily on the grounds of uncertainty of its dating. That is the extent of

what we can know from the literary and archaeological record concerning the historical context of Paul and Corinth. He recognizes the inherent weakness in attempting reconstruction of events or beliefs at Corinth. He does, however, provide a compelling argument for Gnostic intertextuality between the Gospel of Thomas and the usage of the Jesus tradition by the Corinthians (Gos. Thom. 5 and 6 with 1 Corinthians 4:5; Gos Thom. 17 with 1 Corinthians 2:9). Even though the Gnostic connections with the Corinthian correspondence do not receive scholarly attention as in the past, Koester still provides some literary evidence for its influence. Koester argues that Paul is silent on a number of salient issues because he is more concerned with constituting an eschatological society and has no interest in the social or political structures of Roman Corinth, unless they foster his mission to build up the *ekklēsia* into a harmonious group of believers that are egalitarian in approach, peaceful in orientation, and living together as the Body of Christ eagerly awaiting his return. Koester argues that this understanding of realized eschatology is vital to properly understanding Paul's concerns in 1 Corinthians, as well as, his silence on political or temporal issues that would have been concerns within the new community.

Steven J. Friesen argues that the traditional emphasis on social status that ignores significant discussion on wealth misunderstands the vital indicator of status in the pre-industrial, agrarian society of the Roman Empire. He argues that too many New Testament scholars (i.e., Theissen and Meeks) provide confusing descriptions of the Pauline community as a cross-section of rich and poor by not realizing that much of our demographic information comes from the Corinthian correspondence and Romans 16, whether it provides information on the individuals in Rome or Ephesus, and thus focus on

un-measurable categories of social status. Friesen, on the other hand, argues for a measurable category of wealth as a more precise locator of social status. He concludes, however, that there is ultimately no reliable information concerning these people who formed the early communities of faith. So, he presents an economic model of seven graduated categories that describe the nuances of wealth and poverty in the Imperial economy and notes that the majority, if not all, of the Pauline community lived around the poverty line more clearly defined as subsistence living (near, at, or below the level of poverty). He does not see any of the community members coming from the Imperial elite of Roman society. Chloe (1 Corinthians 1:11), Phoebe (Romans 16:1-2), and Erastus are seen as individuals of moderate to surplus wealth (365). Friesen, following Meggitt and contra Koester, also does not think that the Erastus inscription should be correlated with the person in Romans 16:23 and even provides evidence for a slave named Longinus using the title *aedile* on his wife's tombstone. Friesen ultimately notes that the conclusion of his demographic study of the Pauline community show that this community is quite similar in economic structure as the broader Roman Empire in the mid-first century.

Richard A. Horsley offers a corrective for the scholarly approaches that offer a false bifurcation between the social-political and the religious worlds in the Pauline communities. He suggests that an over-reliance on functional approaches in social-scientific studies, similar to those by Theissen and Meeks, produce misleading results. Horsley argues that Paul's mission was to set-up an "alternative society" (388) that challenged the accepted practices of Roman imperial order (1 Corinthians 2:6-8). Thus, because Roman rule is fleeting they should adjudicate disagreements within the community of believers (1 Corinthians 6:1-11) and attempt to resolve the disparity

between their old life in Roman Corinth and their new life in this alternative society (1 Corinthians 7 and sexual relations). He also attempts to apply this approach to the vexing exegetical issue of slavery in 1 Corinthians 7:21; however, this is one of the weakest aspects of his exegesis and it does not actually support his broader contention that this alternative society is to be separate from the dominate imperial rule, if anything, this may be Horsley engaging in that which he criticized Theissen, projecting western society on Paul's letters. This small quibble aside, Horsley provides significant insights into the identity issues relevant to the Corinthians. He argues that Paul's primary concern is the sustaining of identity of this alternative community within the dominate Roman imperial order and not simply establishing another religious cult. This alternative community, Horsley argues was "an international anti-imperial movement of communities that he saw as constituting an alternative society of justice, co-operation, and mutually opposed to the Roman imperial order, which was finally being terminated through God's action in Christ." (394)

James Walters argues that the increased internal conflict in Corinth was, in part, because of a lack of external conflict supported by the evolving civic identity in Roman Corinth during the mid-first century. The role that the Roman character of Corinth played in its civic identity, Walters argues, contributed to the socio-economic diversity of the community of believers, here he follows the contours of Theissen's contention, which have been challenged earlier on in this work by Friesen. Walters will need to establish more effective evidence for the cross-section of social status at Corinth and also address some of the criticisms that have been leveled against Theissen and Meeks, for that matter. Walters is most effective in describing the way civic identity functioned at both the

personal and social levels while also making a compelling case for how identity issues impacted Paul's mission. Walters suggests that weak group identity and the boundary issues associated with it impact the factionalism inherent in the Corinthian correspondence. Following Mitchell, he makes a case for this factionalism being the reason for Paul's rhetorical approach in the letter. One question that arises from this line of reasoning: Why does the lack of external pressure produce more internal pressure? He offers a couple of reasons (i.e., varying social strata, levels of commitment, and allegiances); however, these conflicts would be present whether external pressure was present or not. Walters offers an essay that provides the reader with an overview of a number of the social-scientific approaches to 1 Corinthians and makes a strong case that the lack of external pressure and the ambivalence of the Corinthian civic identity contributed to the weak group boundaries and factionalism that Paul needed to address as he sought to further his mission in Corinth.

Guy Sanders' second entry in this work summarizes the archaeological evidence for the religious practices in Roman Corinth in both early Christianity and in the final stages of public expressions of Hellenic religion (300-600 C.E.). He notes that the worship of Demeter and Asklepiion continued until the end of the fourth century. The finds from the Panayia Field provides the most evidence for Hellenic worship including frescoes of Nike, and small statues of Roma. Sanders also notes the his work on ceramics with Kathleen Slane have caused them to suggest a new dating scheme requires a later dating for many of the finds from the Panayia Field. Burial practices during this time also start to reflect more Christian practices; however, there is also evidence of some assimilation of Hellenic funeral rites into the emerging burial liturgy. The evidence of

clear-cut Christian burial practices, however, dates from the late fifth century. Sanders' survey concludes with the four Christian Basilicas in Corinth, which he notes contained a rather large section for "adult catechumens, suggesting a large population of unbaptized Corinthians." (440) The earliest evidence for public buildings being used for public worship dates to 475 C.E while significant evidence is not seen until the sixth century for the overwhelming presence of Christianity and its symbols in Corinth. Sanders' concludes with an intriguing question: What took Christianity so long to become the predominate religion in Corinth? With his new dating in mind and some geologic records he suggests that the presence of natural disasters (i.e., earthquakes) and the natural tendency of people to look for answers and comfort may have finally provided the impetus for the Corinthians to finally, by the mid-sixth century accept Christianity.

Vasiliki Limberis of Temple University provides historic and literary evidence for ecclesial development in Roman Corinth in the fourth and fifth centuries. She limits her discussion to the rise of the civic responsibilities of the clergy and the development of a cult of the saints and relics. She notes that Corinth was in a unique position, being in the east, it was still under the control of Rome. Thus, their position was always one of tension between Rome and Constantinople. Limberis provides a catalog that shows the importance of localizing the sacred geographically. She introduces the reader to St. Leonidas, St. Kodratos, Victorinus, St. Helikonis of Thessaloniki, and others. She concludes this survey with St. Kyriakos the Anchorite who, she argues, is an example of the emerging ruling-clergy class. She also notes that Corinth, surprisingly really did not have a significant impact on church and doctrinal history. Corinth, however, was the provincial capital of Achaia and though 'stood' in the shadows of more important cities

in early Christianity, was a vital city with a well developed Christian identity that continued as a witness for the Christian message throughout this period.

The essays in *Urban Religion in Roman Corinth* present a truly interdisciplinary approach to biblical studies, archaeology, and ritual studies. The broad spectrum of contributors provides a balanced presentation of the material, while still keeping the work focused. Oftentimes, multi-author works lose their focus and read like disparate pieces or idiosyncratic articles with little editorial continuity; however, Schowalter and Friesen have done an admirable job in providing the reader with a work that is worth the investment of time and effort in reading. Readers looking for a simple affirmation of accepted approaches to Corinthian and Pauline studies will not find this work comforting, there are significant advances in the areas of archaeology (i.e., dating of the Corinthian pottery), social-scientific criticism (i.e., the role of ethnic identity), and Pauline studies (i.e., Mitchell's proposal for the Corinthian partition theory), to name a few. I found this collection of works to be stimulating, challenging, and engaging and I expect this book will serve as a key orienting work in Corinthian and Pauline studies for years to come.