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The First Urban Churches 3: Ephesus, Writings from the Greco-Roman World suppl. 9, Atlanta: SBL Press, ISBN 978088414, pp. 361+xx, A\$88.

Reviewed by David W.J. Gill

These three volumes form part of *The First Urban Churches* project that considers the movement of Christianity across the eastern cities of the Roman empire as far as Rome. The series of contributions seek to look at the literary, historical, epigraphic, and archaeological evidence that can be used to provide the setting for the New Testament epistles, as well as the Acts of the Apostles and the book of Revelation.

This holistic approach to the study of early Christianity places New Testament studies alongside the study of the Roman empire, especially the provinces in the eastern Mediterranean. This move towards a broader approach should be welcomed both by those researching early Christianity, as well as the classical world.

Methodological Foundations

The first volume in the series considers the methodological approach. James R. Harrison presents the rationale for the series (pp. 1–40).

Epigraphy provides key evidence for the working of urban environments and administrative structures. Two essays explore this area: Paul Trebilco, ‘Epigraphy and the study of polis and *ekklesia* in the Greco-Roman world’ (pp. 89–109); Julien M. Ogereau, ‘Methodological considerations in using epigraphic evidence to determine the socioeconomic context of the early Christians’ (pp. 245–75). Trebilco presents a useful introduction to some key documents that relate to New Testament studies. He reminds us that few inscriptions provide direct evidence for the spread of Christianity. He rehearses the inscription relating to the Roman governor Gallio from the Panhellenic sanctuary of Delphi as a way of fixing the chronology for Paul’s visit to Corinth (pp. 95–96). The benefaction of a piazza outside the theatre at Corinth by the aedile Erastus – the praenomen and the nomen are lost – suggests a possible link with the Erastus, the *oikonomos* of the city, mentioned in *Romans* (16:23; see also 2 *Timothy* 4:20; pp. 96–98). One of the issues is how the Roman role of aedile would be translated into Greek: is *oikonomos* the equivalent or would it be a lesser role? The *Cambridge Greek Lexicon* tends towards the lesser roles: manager or steward. The use of εὐαγγέλιον in the calendar inscription of 9 BC relating to Augustus presents a different view of how the ‘gospel’ could be understood (p. 99). The inscription of C. Vibius Salutaris from Ephesus perhaps sheds more light on the importance of the cult of Artemis in the city than perhaps the spread of Christianity (pp. 100–1). Ogereau presents a thought-provoking essay rooted in the work of Louis Robert. The question of whether or not epigraphy should be the exclusive domain of epigraphists, or if scholars from other parts of the discipline should be able to use this type of evidence, is intellectually fascinating. The *Lex Portorii Asiae* is applied to the church at Ephesus (pp. 264–67).

Malcolm Choat considers papyrological evidence, ‘The city in Roman Egypt: the evidence of the papyri’ (pp. 67–88), and the reader is reminded that the cities of Egypt were not totally representative of cities in other parts of the Greek east. Bradley J. Bitner presents the numismatic evidence for the colony of Corinth: ‘Coinage and colonial identity: Corinthian numismatics and the Corinthian correspondence’ (pp. 151–87). The duoviral coinage issued in Corinth reinforces the Roman nature of the colony. Methodologically, this essay fits into this first volume, but perhaps it could have tried to place the series

in a wider colonial context for the eastern Mediterranean; the contribution could equally have been placed in volume 2 of the series alongside other Corinth-based studies.

Brigitte Kahl responds to the iconographic approach of Paul Zanker (Zanker 1988) by exploring the place of the gate to the *agora* at Miletus: ‘Gaia, polis, and *ekklēsia* at the Miletus market gate: an eco-critical reimagining of Revelation 12:16’ (pp. 111–50). Can a Hadrianic structure like this have a bearing on our understanding of the iconography of the mid-first century CE? The iconographic theme is continued by James R. Harrison: ‘Urban portraits of the “barbarians” on the fringes of the Roman Empire: archaeological, numismatic, epigraphic, and iconographic evidence’ (pp. 277–317). The creation of the image of the ‘barbarian’ was influenced by the Greek perception of the other, adopted by Rome as the iconography of Pergamon with its victories over the Gauls in Anatolia was assimilated. Among the buildings considered in this essay is the propylon at Pisidian Antioch. There is also a consideration of Augustus’ victories over barbarians that were celebrated in Rome (see also Favro 1996).

Alan Cadwallader explores aspects of gladiatorial events in Anatolia: ‘Assessing the potential of archaeological discoveries for the interpretation of New Testament texts: the case of a gladiator fragment from Colossae and the letter to the Colossians’ (pp. 41–66). The focus is on a relief showing a gladiator that was found at Colossae. There is mention of a relief now in the Royal Ontario Museum (inv. 980.278.B) ‘said to have come from Asia Minor’, though also linked to Lycia. Cadwallader also discusses the gladiator cemetery at Ephesus (p. 56) and links the reference to fighting with beasts at Ephesus (1 Cor. 15:32) to gladiatorial shows. He mentions three amphitheatres from Asia (p. 50). It would be worth noting the epigraphic evidence for the provision of a wooden amphitheatre at Pisidian Antioch by L. Calpurnius Longus in the middle of the first century CE, where *venationes* and gladiatorial shows took place over a two-month period (*CIL* III. 6832; Ramsay 1924: 178–79, no. 5; see also Robinson 1925: 254; Robert 1940: 140, no. 92; Mitchell and Waelkens 1998: 224–25).

L.L. Welborn uses different types of evidence to explore socio-economic issues: ‘The polis and the poor: reconstructing social relations from different genres of evidence’ (pp. 189–243). There is a presentation of the definitions of ‘the poor’ and how that would be considered in the ancient world. Different genres of writing are considered, from poetry to historical texts. Archaeological evidence is drawn mostly from Italy, though the excavations at Corinth are also considered.

One wonders if the urban framework could have been framed around the civic status of urban communities. For example, a series of case studies on early Christian communities in Roman colonies in the Greek east would have been helpful (see Gill 2017). The richness

of evidence for Pisidian Antioch, Philippi and Corinth, each from different provinces of the Greek east, could have allowed a more sensitive approach to the urban environments. Alongside this would be the Romanised Hellenistic cities or *poleis* of the Greek east, some of which came to prominence under Alexander the Great and his successors (see Fraser 1996). The contrast between the reception of Christianity in the Greek *polis* of Athens and the Roman colony of Corinth, both in the same Roman province, would have been worth considering (see Williams II 1987).

Corinth

James R. Harrison provides an overview of the material culture of Roman Corinth with an essay on ‘Excavating the Urban Life of Roman Corinth’ (pp. 1–45). It is important to stress the break between the Hellenistic *polis* destroyed by Rome in 146 BCE, and the foundation of the Roman *colonia* in 44 BCE (see Gill 1993). Little of the earlier city remained visible except for the archaic temple that overlooked the forum, though this appears to have been adapted for Roman cult (Williams II 1987). Harrison includes mention of the Isthmian Games, which may have provided the athletic imagery for Paul (1 Cor. 9:24–27). This is expanded in the volume’s final essay again by Harrison: ‘Paul and the *agonothetai* at Corinth: engaging the civic values of antiquity’ (pp. 271–326). The wealth of Latin inscriptions from the colony is in marked contrast to the Greek of the Corinthian correspondence.

L.L. Welborn writes on ‘Inequality in Roman Corinth: Evidence from Diverse Sources Evaluated by a Neo-Richardian Model’ (pp. 47–84). Did there need to be a more nuanced approach to the use of Strabo (pp. 48–49)? When Strabo passed through the colony with Octavian in 29 BCE (post the victory at Actium in 31), the city would have been newly established. How far did Strabo draw on the widely held perception of the classical and Hellenistic city? There is a helpful overview of Tiberius Claudius Dinippus, the *curator annonae*, and the implications for food shortages (pp. 60–64). Welborn revisits the possible link between the aedile Erastus, who provided a square next to the theatre, and the *oikonomos* of the city Erastus known from Romans (16:23) (pp. 71–72).

Cavan Concannon writes on ‘Negotiating Multiple Modes of Religion and Identity in Roman Corinth’ (pp. 85–104). The movement of individuals is considered, which of course would have been necessary, given that this was a newly established colonia. How did migrants from Italia or Asia have an impact on the city? This essay is balanced by Kathy Ehrensperger: ‘Between polis, oikos, and ekklēsia: the challenge of negotiating the spirit world (1 Cor 12:1–11)’ (pp. 105–32). The mention of the re-establishment of the cult of Aphrodite (Venus) on Acrocorinth perhaps needs to be seen in the light of the mythological origins of the founder of the Roman colony, C. Julius Caesar. Michael Peppard writes on ‘Brother against brother: *Controversiae* about inheritance disputes

and 1 Corinthians 6:1–11’ (pp. 133–51). He considers the section in the Corinthian correspondence against the Roman colonial legal setting.

David K. Pettigrew emphasises the territory of the colony: ‘The changing rural horizons of Corinth’s first urban Christians’ (pp. 153–83). The place of the colony of Corinth within the province might have been considered. For example, the honorific Augustan inscription – dated specifically to CE 1/2 – awarding L. Licinnius Anteros the right to graze flocks on the Methana peninsula adjacent to Troezenia, is a reminder how the colonial social élite were honoured by some of the minor *poleis* in the province (see Foxhall, Gill, and Forbes 1997, 273–74, no. 15). Evidence from intensive field surveys in Greece have suggested that the countryside in the first century CE was less well populated (e.g. Jameson, Runnels, and van Andel 1994; Bowden and Gill 1997; Bintliff and Snodgrass 1988).

The language used in the colony and the rest of the province of Achaëa is so important. The Corinthian correspondence was written in Greek, and yet the public language witnessed by the inscriptions and texts on coins was Latin: Corinth itself was responsible for the organisation of the Panhellenic games at nearby Isthmia, a celebration of Greekness. Bradley J. Bitner considers language in the Roman colony through epigraphy: ‘Mixed-language inscribing at Roman Corinth’ (pp. 185–218). It includes a useful list of mixed Latin-Greek inscriptions from the colony.

Frederick J. Long writes on ‘“The God of the Age” (2 Cor. 4:4) and Paul’s empire-resisting gospel at Corinth’ (pp. 219–69). He picks up on the theme of the imperial cult. Perhaps there needs to be sensitivity between how the imperial cult was presented in Greek cities and Roman colonies of the east (see Price 1984; Williams II 1987; Walbank 1989). In particular, what were the differences in the worship of the emperors across the province? It might have been worth considering the evidence from major *poleis*, such as Messene (see conveniently Themelis 2003), or from Sparta (Cartledge and Spawforth 1989).

Ephesus

The great port city of Ephesus, serving the province of Asia, is the subject of the third volume. An introductory essay on the history and topography of the city would have been helpful. A possible oversight in the literature is Stephen Mitchell’s two volume work on *Anatolia*, which would have placed Ephesus, and the rise of Christianity, in a wider regional setting (Mitchell 1993a, 1993b).

James R. Harrison provides ‘An epigraphic portrait of Ephesus and its villages’ (pp. 1–67), drawing on the wealth of well over 3,500 inscriptions from the city. He considers the rich inscriptions relating to the cult of Artemis, and provides an overview of some of the élite families. There is a helpful section on freedmen and slaves in the epigraphic evidence. Harrison’s second essay in

the volume, ‘Ephesian cultic officials, their benefactors, and the quest for civic virtue: Paul’s alternative quest for status in the epistle to the Ephesians’ (pp. 253–97) further explores the social élite in the city. He makes the point that this has not been the subject of New Testament scholarship in the way that Corinthian correspondence has.

Guy MacLean Rogers considers mystery cults in ‘An Ephesian tale: mystery cults, reverse theological engineering, and the triumph of Christianity in Ephesus’ (pp. 69–91). Bradley J. Bitner writes on ‘Acclaiming Artemis in Ephesus: political theologies in Acts 19’ (pp. 127–169), exploring the gathering in the theatre at Ephesus with the acclamation, ‘Great is Artemis of the Ephesians’. His comments on the inscription relating to Mên and dated to 57 CE from Lydia could have been considered against the richness of texts from the extra-mural sanctuary outside Pisidian Antioch (Lane 1971, 1976, 1978; see also Mitchell and Waelkens 1998), where (male) Mên was equated with the (female) Luna. Stephan Witetschek considers the cult image of the Artemision in ‘From Zeus or by Endoios? Acts 19:35 as a peculiar assessment of the Ephesian Artemis’ (pp. 235–52). Are we considering the blending of a cult where a venerated image that was considered to have fallen from Zeus was replaced with one that was more visually (and intellectually) acceptable to worshippers in a classical city? In the same way, the cult of Mên could be seen either in terms of a crescent moon or in anthropomorphic forms. Likewise, the *baetyls* that formed the focus of cult in cities across the eastern empire, such as Aphrodite of Paphos on Cyprus, could be replaced by anthropomorphic deities (Gill 1992). A further study on Artemis appears in Michael P. Theophilos’ essay ‘Ephesus and the numismatic background to νεοκόροϛ’ (pp. 299–331).

Paul Trebilco provides a particularly strong, and clearly structured, ‘The Jewish community in Ephesus and its interaction with Christ-believers in the first century CE and beyond’ (pp. 93–126). Trebilco maps out the origins of the Jewish community at Ephesus, suggesting that it was probably firmly established during the third century BCE. He helpfully rehearses the possible size of the Jewish community, perhaps several thousand in number (p. 102). He considers this community as a background to 1 and 2 Timothy. His reflection on the possible interaction between the Jewish and Christian communities in Ephesus is particularly thought-provoking.

Mikael Haxby writes on ‘The gladiator graveyard of Ephesus as evidence for the study of Martyrdom’ (pp. 171–91). He draws on the evidence derived from the 1993 excavation of a necropolis on the road leading to the Artemision. A number of funerary reliefs depicting gladiators were found. A forensic examination of the associated bones suggests that individuals had suffered serious trauma. He then turns to the question of diet and draws on a number of Christian martyrdom texts.

Fredrick J. Long's essay 'Ἐκκλησία in Ephesians as godlike in the heavens, in temple, in γάμος, and in armor: ideology and iconography in Ephesus and its environs' (pp. 193–234) reflects on the Romanisation of Ephesus following its incorporation into the Roman Empire. He considers the Christian use of the term *ekklesia* against its political meaning in the *poleis* of the Greek east. Equally significant is the use of *soter*, both within a Christian setting (as a title of Jesus), and the title of the emperor, as well as other deities (see, for example, Gill 2004).

Conclusion

The essays in these three volumes record a snapshot of scholarship on the topic of the first urban churches. This reviewer would have found it helpful to have a position chapter both introducing the city and drawing out how the chapters in the volume have clarified the issue of Christianity in an urban setting. The Ephesus volume, in particular, could have been strengthened by adopting a clearer structure that grouped the essays around some common themes. An introduction and/or a conclusion would also have helped to identify what had been gained from the contributions towards our understanding of the setting of these early Christian communities.

The methodological chapter might have been clearer in looking at different types of evidence. What are the different approaches? What case studies could be deployed? Would some of the methodological essays have been better placed in the subsequent city volumes? Should there have been clearer editorial direction about how the essays fitted together? A methodological essay (or two) looking at how the Corinthian correspondence could be read against the backdrop of the classical world would have been a valuable contribution.

How could the approach of this series be expanded? The richness of the archaeological and epigraphic evidence for Pisidian Antioch could be read against the Book of the Acts of the Apostles and Galatians. How did the Jewish community fit into the Roman colony? How did the church develop compared to that at Corinth, or indeed at Philippi? It was the Roman governor of Cyprus, Sergius Paulus, who appears to have given (the newly renamed) Paul an introduction to this key Roman colony in Galatia. Was this a particularly strategic establishment of a church community in the Anatolian heartlands?

Do New Testament scholars need to be more sensitive to chronological issues? Evidence drawn from the mid-first century CE is very different to the material derived from the second century, in which there was a stronger Greek identity fostered by the emperor Hadrian.

The essays in these three volumes contribute to our understanding of the cultural and sociological setting of two early church communities in the Greek east. However, there is probably a need to try and develop a

reconstruction of life in these cities against the backdrop of the New Testament documents (see Winter 2001).

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