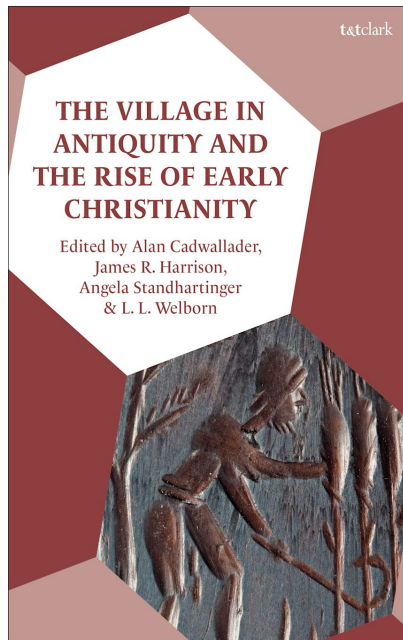




Alan Cadwallader, James R. Harrison, Angela Standhartinger, and L. L. Welborn, eds.

The Village in Antiquity and the Rise of Early Christianity

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The Village in Antiquity and the Rise of Early Christianity is a welcome addition to the corpus of literature on the early Jesus movement and the first Christian centuries. Using current literary and archaeological evidence in regions pertinent to New Testament studies, editors Alan H. Cadwallader, James R. Harrison, Angela Standhartinger, and L. L. Welborn and the book's fourteen authors have compiled an extensive collection of studies of smaller communities. Two main recurring themes of the project, tension between villages and their nearest cities and the interdependence between rural and urban contexts, significantly move the research forward.

The first two chapters introduce us to the main arguments and methodologies. In "The Ancient Village and the Rise of Christianity," veteran scholar Thomas Robinson questions the thesis that "early Christianity was almost exclusively an urban movement," that Christianity only slowly crept into rural areas. Even though "the Roman Empire was overwhelmingly *rural*" (3, emphasis original), villages have largely been neglected in the literature. This neglect defies the evidence: urban locales were often populated with people with rural origins, and, in daily life, the city and the countryside operated in tandem (6–7). Robinson further notes the "rural aspect of diasporic Judaism" (12) and offers critiques of the preeminent works of Rodney Stark, Wayne Meeks, and Ramsay MacMullen (14–15). Robinson offers clear and well-reasoned arguments, and readers will enjoy his light and engaging style.

In “Methodological Issues in the Study of Ancient Villages,” Cadwallader dialogues with an influential 1909 paper of William Ramsay and *The Thousand and One Churches*, coauthored with Gertrude Bell; Ramsay and Bell harshly criticized fellow historians for presenting a “one-sided and misleading” view of history (27). Using the Asia Minor region of Lycaonia as an example, Cadwallader (following Ramsay and Bell) lays out parameters for methodological issues around defining nonurban settlements. Cadwallader reiterates problems with the dearth of nonliterary evidence, such as inscriptions and papyri, and the wide variety of terms used for nonpolis settlements. Even in Mark’s Gospel, for instance, both ἀργός and κώμη “seem generally to refer to small population centers with little distinction from one another” (33). Cadwallader urges taking a broad perspective about village life and using “methodological care” with the “paucity of epigraphical, papyrological and archaeological evidence for Christ followers” (60).

The next four sections explore the village in the ancient Near East, Asia Minor, mainland and Isthmian Greece, and the Italian peninsula. For those interested in the New Testament, the early church, and the eras that preceded them, this division makes the use of the volume congenial for classroom use, in-depth analyses, and reference.

Kyle H. Keimer lays out the challenges faced when exploring “Village Life in Ancient Israel,” including the problem of definitions; he starkly illustrates this with a table of over a dozen terms used for settlement types (83). A useful starting point, however, is the centrality of kinship groups; a village in the ancient Israelite context is “a settlement in which all, or certainly a majority of, people considered themselves to be related, either through blood or fictively” (79).

In “Village Life in Roman Galilee: Issues Arising from Poverty and Social Unrest,” Warren Carter focuses on first-century CE Galilean villages, using Josephus, Q, and archaeological evidence from locations such as Gamla, Capernaum, and Cana. Carter, utilizing the work of Steven J. Friesen, provides a poverty scale table that clearly lays out seven population categories, their descriptions, and the possible percentage of the population for each category (105).

Boyo G. Ockinga, in “Deir-el-Medina: An Egyptian Village of the Latter Half of the Second Millennium BCE,” also encounters definitional challenges, as have previous authors, but still deftly mines the evidence from Deir-el-Medina. We learn about the layout of most houses, how workers were paid, and the relatively high literacy rates, including among women. Ockinga extensively discusses the role of religion and quotes from a number of enlightening ostraca and papyri.

Stephen Llewelyn and Alexandra Robinson offer two essays on trust networks: “Trust Networks and Village Life in Roman Egypt: A Case Study of Tebtunis” and “Trust Networks and Village Life in Roman Galilee: A Case Study of the Gospel Narratives and Acts.” Both pieces include helpful, important details about the role of associations for village dwellers and how the various inscriptions and texts inform us about Christians and Christian groups.

In “Village Life in the Gospels,” Keith Dyer analyzes the four canonical gospels in conjunction with archaeological data from synagogues, mikvaot, tombs, and domestic dining debris. He shows that the gospel writers have “an ability to translate and adapt the story of Jesus for their own contexts” (170).

Mark Wilson, in “Village Life in Galatia,” incorporates maps and photographs to describe cities of the Galatian region and the urban-village relationship. He deals almost extensively with the accounts of Paul in Acts, mentioning the letter to the Galatians only once (219); he notes that the recipients of Paul’s letters would have been both village and urban dwellers.

“Village Life in the Kaystros River Valley of Ephesus,” by James R. Harrison, further develops the recurring theme of the relationship of cities to villages. With at least twelve Ephesian villages in the Kaystros Valley, a significant amount of epigraphic and other evidence is available for study. Particularly interesting to New Testament scholars is Harrison’s treatment of the “landholdings of the sacred sanctuary of Ephesian Artemis” (227) and deities such as Demeter and Mên. Harrison’s is a particularly useful assessment of the lives of ordinary people and how elites took positive action for the common good.

Cadwallader provides insights about ancient Colossae (now Chonai) in “Village Life in the Lycus Valley.” The Lycus Valley in Phrygia, Western Turkey, was a fertile and productive region and included the cities of Colossae, Laodikeia, and Hierapolis, familiar to us through the letters to the Colossians and Philemon and the book of Revelation. Using coins, inscriptions, and curse tablets, Cadwallader unearths information about the relationship between the villages and cities, the various deities that were revered, the ethnic diversity of the inhabitants, and the role of viticulture and animal husbandry in the region.

“Rural Communities and Early Christianity in Roman Philippi: A Tale of Missed Opportunities,” by Cédric Brélaz, interrogates the standard narrative about Philippi as essentially urban: it “had a rural character first and foremost” (277). Brélaz provides a comprehensive history of the imperial-era colony, observing that there was an “exceptionally high number of rural communities attested in the territory” (282). Native Thracians retained a high degree in autonomy (282) and spoke Latin fluently while laying claim “to a mixed identity” (284), and Thracian and Roman religious practices had analogies with some aspects of Christianity. Even scholars who have been engaged with Philippi for decades will learn a great deal from this essay.

Polyxeni Adam-Veleni and Flora Karagianni, in “Village Life in the Macedonian Hinterland of Thessaloniki,” admit readily that “archaeological evidence for the countryside outside of Thessaloniki is still in its infancy” (295). Yet they tap several new sources to flesh out the nature of farms in the region that produced wine, oil, cereals, and textiles. We learn about working conditions, the relationship between landowners and workers (many of them slaves), and the area’s

primary deities: Athena, Artemis, Aphrodite, Dionysos, the Rider God, and the Kabeiri. The essay is richly illustrated and quite informative; readers may also benefit from Laura Nasrallah, Charalambos Bakirtzis, and Steven J. Friesen, editors, *From Roman to Early Christian Thessalonikē: Studies in Religion and Archaeology* (Harvard University Press, 2010), which is not listed in the bibliography.

In “Early Christianity in the Villages of Corinthia,” L. L. Welborn faces the same problem of the dearth of evidence from villages. He, too, however, greatly expands our knowledge of this important area for New Testament studies. Scholars of women in antiquity will be gratified to see an important consideration of Phoebe from Rom 16:1–2, a minister, benefactor, and patron from Corinth’s port of Kenchreai (125–29). Wellborn intriguingly links Phoebe with several of Corinth’s later Christian basilicas. His essay contains more specifically Christian information than most of the others in this volume.

Harrison, in “Village Life in the Italian Peninsula and the Expansion of the Christian Movement: Literary and Epigraphic Perspectives,” continues the discussion of the difficulty caused by “a variety of meanings” for the many terms used (343). He explores in depth the meaning of *vici* in Roman and Italian contexts, mining a great deal of information from a general paucity of literary and epigraphic evidence. His analysis expands our knowledge of patrons, men of high rank, day laborers, associations, magic, and especially market days and fairs, all of which inform our knowledge of the growth of Christianity.

The final section, “Thematic Essays,” contains three essays that bring many of the threads together. Christiane Zimmermann’s “The Life of Village Women in Antiquity: A Case Study on Lycaonia” examines the large number of Christian funerary inscriptions in Galatia that feature women. Anyone interested in the lives of women in the Roman imperial era will benefit from this article. The only drawback is that some words that she translates as “deaconess” should be “deacon,” since the original Greek (which she does not include) is *διάκονος* (see 385 n. 94).

In “The Social and Economic Life on Estates in Asia Minor,” Thomas Corsten focuses on the many large estates found in the region and provides helpful information about the self-administered indigenous villages on the land, how they were run, and the relationships between tenants and landowners. We learn about farmers’ merrymaking, communal feasting, and religious life, which were frequently intertwined and had financial implications.

“Village Associations as Microcosms of Greek Cities,” by D. Clint Burnett, rounds out the thematic essays with an analysis of “private associations,” “those that ancient governments ... did not fund but that private individuals did” (404). He makes use of the overwhelming corpus of inscriptions created by individuals between the late first century BCE to the second century CE (405). The reader learns about membership requirements, the somewhat democratic nature of the groups,

and how members honored their beneficent members; these traits were patterned “after institutions of Greek cities” (413).

In addition to being very well edited, *The Village in Antiquity* helpfully includes illustrations (both figures and tables), abbreviations, and indexes of ancient and early Christian writings, inscriptions, papyri, and ostraka, and names. The subject index is unusual, grouped mainly by the separate regions or topics (e.g., Villages in Roman Galilee, Villages in the Corinthia), rather than, for instance, “trust networks” or “women.” Also, there is no comprehensive bibliography; each essay contains its own. However, these are minor issues compared to the overall value of the volume.