

BOOK REVIEW

Friesen, Steven J., Sarah A. James and Daniel N. Schowalter (eds.), *Corinth in Contrast: Studies in Inequality* (NovTSup, 155; Leiden: Brill, 2014). xviii + 273 pp. Hbk. \$165.00.

This collection of interesting and instructive essays is the third volume of studies that began with a conference at Harvard Divinity School back in 2002 and continued on at the University of Texas. The essays represent a cross-disciplinary approach involving ‘archaeologists, historians, ceramicists, epigraphists, New Testament scholars, art historians’ and others (p. 1). The focus grew out of the second conference’s particular attention to three major themes ‘Greek and Roman aspects of Corinthian urban identity; social stratification; and local religious traditions’ (p. 1). The studies do not simply represent a unified approach to the inequalities that ‘permeated Corinthian society’. They cover the various ‘forms of inequality’ that include ‘urban/rule, male/female, Greek/Roman, rich/poor, pagan/Christian, Jew/Gentile, monotheist/polytheist, slave/free, high/low/status etc.’ (p. 2). Subsequently, one of their goals is ‘to understand better the distinctions between different social strata that characterized the ancient world’ while opening a window into the “invisible”, the poorest parts of the population’ (p. 3). The second goal is to examine the question of ‘why inequalities are so prevalent in human communities’ and also the more vexing issue of why such ‘inequalities are morally acceptable’ (p. 3). Hence, the ‘overarching theme’ is the study of inequality in the Corinthian social, economic and religious context (p. 18).

The book is divided into three parts: ‘Elites and Non-Elites’ (pp. 17-100), ‘Socio-Economic Inequalities in Corinth’ (pp. 103-183) and ‘Inequalities in Gender and Religion in Roman Corinth’ (pp. 187-244). Friesen, James and Schowalter head up the first introductory chapter by giving a concise overview of each section and the corresponding essays. This book represents an intensive cross-collaboration of experts with the support of two specialists on Corinthia, Elizabeth Gebhard and

Timothy Gregory, to whom the volume is dedicated. The reader will be pleased to know that in each chapter, the contributors have not only consistently engaged with the experts in the field, but also with the relevant material and textual remains relating to their specific aspect of Corinthian inequality.

The first essay by Sarah James examines the interim period between the Roman sack of Corinth by General Mummius in 146 BCE and the origins of the new colony in 44 BCE in order to assess the degree of Hellenism that ‘survived into the Roman colony’ (p. 17). She successfully critiques the arguments of those who insist on the complete destruction of Corinth. She argues that there is ‘no evidence’ to substantiate Macrobius’s later fifth-century CE report that a *devotio* ‘ritual polluting’ of the land performed by Mummius took place (pp. 22-23). In contrast, the earlier textual evidence points to the claims of Cicero who said the ‘land of Corinth’ was in fact given to the Roman people (Cicero, *Agr.* 1.5). Additionally, she recounts the widespread debate over what constitutes a ‘destroyed’ city in ancient accounts. Often it is *political* or *economic* ruin, rather than purely *physical*, especially where a rhetoric of exaggeration is obvious. Furthermore, she contends on the basis of ceramic evidence that ‘Corinthian potters were among the interim period inhabitants of Corinth’ (p. 37).

Next, she reasons for continuity of settlement into the interim period because of the material evidence left by the interim farmers (cf. also Sanders’ essay pp. 103-125). This further collaborates with Cicero’s ‘squatters’, who being from the ‘lower echelons of society’ are said to have returned after Mummius (pp. 37 and 19). James also reports on the material evidence from graffiti, ‘non-local’ table and cooking ware, Eastern Sigillata A vessels (common to the Mediterranean in the first century BCE), lamps, coins, amphora and weights that strongly backs settlement continuity into early Roman Corinth. Apparently (since 2010) there are over 350 reported ‘imported objects’ dated to the interim period, and this number continues to grow (n. 53 on p. 27). Continuities are also evident when considering the similarities between Hellenistic and early Roman pottery. Perhaps most significantly, the survival of the *majority* of public buildings compared with a selective destruction of others (i.e. the armoury) supports a Corinthian settlement continuity. In the end, James envisions a surviving interim Hellenistic city composed of mostly lower class inhabitants and farmers that influenced the later colony.

Benjamin Mills, in the second essay illustrates three major groups of Corinthian men: members of the ‘Greek provincial elite’ often called *negotiatores* (p. 42), freeborn Roman citizens from the west but active in the Greek East and freedmen from the Greek East, the latter being the most numerous and ‘predominant’ based on the material evidence (pp. 4, 38, 41, 43). These wealthy freedmen, according to Mills, were ‘the real backbone of the elite at Corinth’, often connected with pre-existing influential businesses prior to moving to Corinth (p. 45). This points to a restricted social mobility because outsiders did not compete their way in, as the evidence suggests they were invited. In fact, a strong case can be made that suggests the Corinthian socio-economic ladder was climbed by younger men with the assistance of their fathers. Mills argues that the governing class of colonial Corinth was not a gradual phenomenon, but formed ‘*en bloc*’ by men of the Greek East as ‘representatives of various interests’, though ‘primarily commercial’, who just happened to be freedman (p. 53).

Laura Nasrallah, in Chapter 4, takes up the issue of ancient slavery (with all its ambiguity and nuances) with special reference to a few passages in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 6.20a; 7.22a, 23a). She postulates that the language of ‘being bought and of being a freedperson’ held ‘particular significance’ at Corinth—beyond the common New Testament scholars’ focus on whether or not Paul implied that slaves should ‘seek freedom’ (pp. 5, 55). The primary issue is hermeneutical—the ‘multiple ways in which those in the Corinthian assembly may have heard his injunctions’ (p. 55). Considering the exceptional collection of ruling freedpersons that were known to inhabit Corinth, 1 Cor. 7.22 provides a singular and noteworthy reference in the New Testament to the ‘status’ of a freedperson (p. 60). She argues against Conzellman’s eschatological and Horsley’s liberationist understanding of 1 Cor. 7.21 and the question of ‘remaining’ in slavery. A better hermeneutical foundation (without negating the former understandings entirely) rests on Adolf Deissmann’s earlier research (*Light from the Ancient East* [trans. L.R.M. Strachan; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1927]) on the ‘material and social realities of slavery at Corinth’ as evidenced by the Delphic and other inscriptions (pp. 64–65). Her keen insights (plus Deissmann’s) shed even greater light on the phrase ‘bought with a price’ that no doubt reflects ‘common knowledge regarding the marketability and monetary value of a slave’ (p. 72). Therefore, being ‘bought with a price’ should be understood

according to the social status and circumstances of each slave, freedperson and slave owner in first-century CE Corinth (p. 73).

While her essay is logical, I disagree with one point where she claims that 1 Tim. 6.1-2, Col. 3.22 and Eph. 6.5 are pseudepigraphal—she assumes this rather than supporting it with research. This is beyond the scope of her essay, but those letters are quite possibly deutero-graphic or even authentic. Later Pauline (or deutero-Pauline) letters that discuss slaves' lives and subjection to their masters are not necessarily justifying slavery, but rather reflecting the existing *haustafeln* (household codes) that permeated Greco-Roman society (cf. Aristotle, *Pol.* 1.1254a, 1.1254b, 1.1255a, 1.1259b, 1.1260a and his use of ἀρχω 'to rule or govern' to describe the relationship of a slave to his or her master).

The last essay in the first section is by Sarah Lepinski, and it demonstrates that the paintings from Corinth (which covered the walls of most Roman buildings) in the first few centuries CE cannot be simply labeled as 'Greek or Roman', as the artistic characteristics of these paintings represent the 'ethnic and cultural diversity inherent in the Roman Mediterranean' (p. 75). This important realization supports the 'mutual borrowing and adaptation of artistic methods and visual forms among various Mediterranean cultures' (p. 75). Lepinski effectively identifies the shift in painting practices, materials and techniques from Hellenistic to Roman styles in 44 BCE (not surprisingly). Curiously, there is an observable shift in the late first and early second century CE *back* to an integration of 'methods and materials that were common in earlier Hellenistic painting tradition' (p. 76). She suggests that the 'technical and aesthetic' characteristics of the Corinthian paintings draw direct 'artistic ties with the Italian peninsula'—so much so she posits the painters were likely trained (or had worked) in Pompeii (p. 84). Although the Italic features of the paintings from 44 BCE reveal close ties with Gaul and Hispania in particular, the references to 'Corinthian mythologies' (i.e. Bellerophon and Pegasus) reflect the cultural heritage of the cities' 'Greek past' (p. 100). In the end, Lepinski successfully challenges the Greek 'or' Roman duality of artistic influence in ancient Corinth. The material evidence underscores the 'multifaceted nature of artistic production' evident in the Roman Mediterranean (p. 100).

The second section on 'Socio-economic Inequalities in Corinth' (pp. 101-183) starts with a creative essay by Guy Sanders that explores the

socio-economic record of the poor majority of Corinth. He does this by examining more recent periods in rural Greece that are ‘better documented’ than those in ancient times (p. 104). His methodology rests on the assumption that the agriculture practices in modern Greece have not changed substantially in the last three millennia prior to the 1950s. This method is better than relying on sharecropping practices in India under British rule, and a step in the right direction, but his projections should not be equated with first-century data. Subsequently, and based on one nineteenth-century Latin document from neighboring Boetia, he postulates that these sharecroppers ‘were much more than subsistence farmers’ based on their surplus yields (p. 111). Subsequently, his modern estimates from the Ottoman era theorize that an average farmer and his family will require approximately eight hectares of unirrigated land around Corinth in order to survive (p. 115). Beyond the ‘super rich’ Sanders proposes that some of the colonists and agricultural laborers lived on ‘3 to 4 times the subsistence level’ while approximately 65 per cent or more of the landless farmers (who did not leave much for the material record) lived ‘close to or at subsistence level’ (p. 124). Last, his call to investigate the (arguably minimal) remains of the urban and rural poor that make up the majority of ancient Corinth, instead of continually focusing on the data-rich remains of the wealthy is worth repeating.

Chapter 7 focuses on the powerful connection between Corinth’s famous Isthmus, its two harbours and its economic prosperity. David Pettigrew supports the idea of a Corinthian commercial *emporion* while challenging the often misunderstood idea of using the Isthmus as a ‘thoroughfare’ (p. 127). The hauling of ships across the Isthmus (via the *diolkos* or portage road), was in fact a rare occurrence and used only for military reasons. A good example of this is when Octavian surprised Antony and Cleopatra after the Battle of Actium (2 September 31 BCE) by crossing the Isthmus because the sea was too choppy to sail around Cape Malea in winter (Cassius Dio, *Historiae Romanae* 51.5.1-3). The evidence, especially textual for such a trans-Isthmus road is scant—Strabo refers only to the narrow Isthmus while Pseudo-Skylax calls it a ‘road of 40 stades’ (p. 129).

Although Strabo and others leave the details unexplained, it is clear that the two harbours (Kenchreai in the east and Lechaion in the west) with Corinth as a ‘kind of entrepôt’ encouraged much trade between Italy and Asia (p. 139). The great gulf between the wealthy merchants

and the low-status *emporoi* (maritime traders) reveals considerable inequality at Roman Corinth. It was this mix of wealthy merchant elite and the ‘invisible workmen, porters, retailers, and sailors of differing levels of wealth’ that formed the very ‘medium’ that the associates of Paul, Aquila, Priscilla and Phoebe ‘entered and exited’ Corinth (p. 142). This, says Pettegrew, was the ‘economic and social environment that shaped and divided their Christian communities’ (p. 142).

In Chapter 8, William Caraher examines the relationship dynamic between the people and imperial authority in sixth-century CE Corinth, given the mixed religious, economic and political climate. Specifically, he highlights the ways that monumental architecture in Corinth projected power in sixth-century Corinth, such as the Lechaion Basilica that reflected a ‘manifestation of imperial policy’ that extended locally the ‘influence’ of emperor Justinian’s authority (pp. 153, 145-53). The use of monumental architecture in the sixth century during the ‘building boom’ across greater Corinth further communicated ‘imperial authority’ to the multitudes of Corinthian workers (pp. 154, 156). Caraher, along with Nelson and Cameron, proposes that Justinian’s affairs created a ‘liturgification’ of society—and this is amply attested by the theological language of two public inscriptions (cf. pp. 160-61). In the end, he argues well that the textual sources and inscriptions during this period grounded imperial interests and authority with liturgy via monumental architecture in a local ‘Corinthian context’ (p. 164).

Daniel Schowalter, in Chapter 9, analyzes two statue-based inscriptions found in Corinth (Regilla-Tyche and Regilla-Peirene, cf. pp. 166-68). He examines and challenges J.H. Kent’s (*The Inscriptions: 1926–1950* [ASCSA: Princeton, 1966]) assessment of the bases as ‘recuts’ that should be placed in the third or fourth century (p. 169). At the outset, Schowalter finds the idea dubious that someone in the third or fourth century would take the ‘time and effort to recreate a dedication for Regilla, the long dead wife of one of the wealthiest men of the mid 2nd century’ (p. 169). After his careful consideration of the epigraphic evidence and the hypothetical ‘social realities’, he dismisses Kent’s theory of re-inscribing these texts (pp. 169, 170-182). He further considers the legal injunctions of the time and suggests a better solution that involves a ‘re-erection’ of the structures to establish a ‘museum-like’ display versus a ‘re-inscription’ (so also Robinson, p. 182). If, the average Corinthian was unaware of the life and

benefaction of Regilla or her husband in the fourth century (as Schowalter admits), this ‘kind of elite re-display of nobility would serve only to highlight the inequality of the society in which they lived’ (p. 183). Regardless of how the inscriptions came to be it is clear that Regilla left a remarkable impression on the people of Corinth.

The third and final section ‘Inequalities in Gender and Religion in Roman Corinth’ opens with a fascinating essay by Ronald Stroud, ‘Religion and Magic in Roman Corinth’. Stroud recounts in detail several of the magical texts and especially ‘curse’ tablets found in Corinth (especially at the sanctuary of Demeter and Kore). These texts, written on lead tablets, and with the probable aid of ‘professional sorceresses’, are often given *by* women and *towards* women (p. 199). Many times they include a prayer for fertility and spare no condemnation of their enemy. He finds that the same kind of sorcery practiced by some of the same women (curse tablets, lamp lighting, communal drinking of potions) co-occurred with ‘religious processions’ and festivals that included prayers, animal sacrifices and dedication of votive objects (p. 201). The evidence points towards normal religious practice in the shrine but at the same time ‘they practiced magic to attack their enemies’ (p. 201). I think Stroud is correct in his illuminating assessment that airtight categories between religion and magic in ancient Corinth (and probably the ancient world in general) do not exist. Magic and religion, according to Stroud are ‘closely intertwined’ in Roman Corinth (p. 202). Last, he wonders if some of these troubled women, who found no success with magic and religion in the Corinthian pagan temples, felt ‘inclined to come down into the lower city to try Paul’s solution for their problems’ (p. 202).

In Chapter 11, Steven Friesen discusses the texts and contexts of the famous Junia of Theodora, who is often used to tell us more about the region of Lycia (Behrwald, Kolb) or Phoebe of Kenchreai (Kearsley, Klauck, p. 220; Rom. 16.1-2). Friesen states that Junia was clearly an ‘individual of extraordinary accomplishments’ (p. 208). Information about her life as a ‘patron of Lycia and its cities’ in Corinth arises from five separate texts that were found in 1954 ‘about 5km from the Roman forum at Corinth’ (pp. 206, 204). What is unique to Friesen’s essay is that he goes beyond the common assessment that she was a notable example in the Roman Imperial Period of the ‘remarkable advances of women’ (p. 208). His methodology rests on applying ‘intersectionality’ developed from gender studies that shows ‘what influence a women

could have if she had the necessary resources ... and if she used them to support Roman domination' (p. 208). He recognizes the limitations with this analysis due to a lack of information on Junia. However, he thinks intersectionality is better able to 'understand the multiplicative structures of inequality at work in her social context' (p. 209). He then considers several factors (i.e. citizenship, gender, wealth, family, inheritance and ethnicity) that 'intersected in various ways that defined the boundaries within which someone like Junia could operate' (p. 214). Friesen's refined view of Junia explains how she managed to negotiate the 'complex structural parameters' such as gender, wealth, family and religion that 'extended Roman domination of the eastern Mediterranean' (p. 223). Junia, along with other male elites in early Roman Corinth worked together to extend Rome's control of Lycia and the entire region.

The last chapter (pp. 227-44) is consumed by the question of mixed marriages in early Christianity and the resultant variety of interpretations. Caroline Hodge looks first to Paul's words to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 7.12-16), secondly, to Tertullian as the 'first extant published author' who talks about mixed marriages and thirdly, the interpretations of unpublished Christians who are 'used in creative ways to support different positions on mixed marriage' (p. 228). Hodge breaks apart Tertullian's (still) influential and overzealous interpretation suggesting that he 'reworked Paul so that he could condemn mixed marriage with the same vehemence and authority projected by the apostle about porneia' (p. 236). I agree with her thought process on Tertullian who, with great irony, argued the very 'opposite' of 1 Cor. 7.14—where existing mixed marriages were acceptable (p. 237). The problem is that Tertullian erroneously used 1 Corinthians 5, 'borrowed heavily' from 6 and subsequently applied it to 7 (pp. 235-37). Her assessment of the views of 'unpublished' Christians is interesting as this is indirectly derived from Tertullian, the later *Canons of Elvira* and Jerome (pp. 240-244). It is the 'persistence' of Christian and non-Christian unions found among the 'unpublished' Christians that become evident based on the published works (p. 243). Arguments for and against mixed marriages back then, and even today, both find 'support for their positions from Paul's letter to believers in Corinth' (p. 244).

In conclusion, this specialized collection of essays is definitely worth the attention of teachers and students of history, archaeology and



classics—and is a must read for New Testament scholars and anyone with an interest in post-classical Corinth to late antiquity. The real value of this book stems from its cross-disciplinary approach and the critical engagement with material *and* textual contexts. While acknowledging their caveat that their emphasis on Corinthian inequality is far from unified, some of the essays (and I will let the reader decide) at times appears to be tailored to fit the volume. Having said that, each of the essays consistently identified the differing social strata of Corinth while illuminating some aspect of Corinthian social, economic and religious inequalities in new and fresh ways. I heartily recommend this book.

Karl L. Armstrong  
McMaster Divinity College  
Hamilton, ON