

BOOK REVIEW

Friesen, Steven J., Daniel N. Schowalter and James C. Walters (eds.), *Corinth in Context: Comparative Studies on Religion and Society* (NovTSup, 134; Leiden: Brill, 2010). Hbk. xxv + 517 pp. \$230 USD.

This collection of essays emerged from a cooperatively sponsored 2007 conference at the University of Texas at Austin. Co-editor Friesen's introduction presents the papers' respective thesis statements clearly, explaining their commonalities in terms of contextual and comparative scholarship, and aligning them around three loci: the Corinthians' self-contextualization with regard to their hybridized Greco-Roman cultural influences and the Roman Empire; their social stratification, as it pertained to their religious and sociopolitical life and vice versa; and, amid competing sociocultural influences, the locality of their religion. The resulting combination is even more interdisciplinary than many such anthologies, offering studies that are richly engaging to read, frequently cross-referenced and challenging to integrate.

The unit on Greco-Roman hybridity and empire opens with Benjamin Millis's portrait of the early Roman colonists' social and ethnic origins. Millis overturns any remaining prejudices concerning 'Greek' and 'Roman' as chronological indicators within the development of Corinth and its population: the colonists promoted themselves as 'legitimate successors and inheritors of the Greek city', even as they 'presented a Roman face to the world' (pp. 15, 32). He helpfully includes the major classical references to the city's character—Strabo, Appian and Plutarch—in Greek and English, in order to demonstrate that the tradition of characterizing Corinth as a veterans' colony (in tandem with Carthage) should also be questioned. Millis reconsiders literary, onomastic and epigraphic evidence (e.g. funerary inscriptions and masons' marks) to refine the image of Corinth as 'a nexus of old and new, conquered and conquerors, Greek and Roman' (p. 35), considerably more Greek in private than in public display.

Bronwen Wickkiser's analysis of the Asklepios cult and Margaret Laird's observations on the *Augustales'* monument in the Corinthian Forum face different aspects of a common reconstructive task. Wickkiser asks why the rebuilding of the Asklepieion was a priority during the colonial rebuilding. To her credit, she looks beyond the obvious reason of securing the divine healer's help, examining the worship of Asklepios as a refraction of his cult in Rome: did the sanctuary's restoration reinstate the god of Greek Corinth, or import the Roman Aesculapius with his strong associations with the Julian family (pp. 57, 59)? Wickkiser could emphasize more deeply the discursive memory of *how* Augustus had doctored the war-torn Roman state, characterized by Dio Cassius (*Hist. rom.* 52–56) as a body in need of healing, soon after he recorded that Augustus put to death a senator who had harvested wood from a grove dedicated to Aesculapius, *as an atonement to both the god and Caesar* (51.8.3). But she cites her own earlier work in support of her point, en route to a conclusion on Asklepios's value to the Corinthians as a patron to needy clients, perhaps including manumitted slaves. Laird sees the *Augustales'* monument as speaking 'as much to Corinth's particular past and [then] present dedicatory environments as it did to imperial power' (p. 71), while enhancing the donors' social standing. She suggests a deliberate positioning of the marker along important sight lines in the Forum, a possible (though debatable) appearance for the lost statue, and the status of the once-complete monument as a popular meeting place that allowed the Corinthians 'to see sympathetically what the *divus* saw', even as it reminded them of their place at Caesar's feet (p. 112).

Cultic and linguistic (dis)continuities propel Christine Thomas's work on Greek heritage in Roman Corinth and Ephesus, as she encourages readers to re-examine apparently equivalent names. I disagree with her assessment that 'refoundation' connotes continuity and is thus less apt than 'revival' or 'renewal' when describing changes in Greco-Roman religious cultures; is not every 'revival' a refoundation of sorts, especially when discussing the remaking of a city as well as its cults? Thomas's focus on *consensual* hybridity, specific to the active and adaptive roles of the colonized, remains convincing nonetheless, especially when applied to the questioning of the Roman claim of superior piety.

The next four studies comment upon social strata, though Mary Hoskins Walbank's 'Image and Cult: The Coinage of Roman Corinth'

could easily be placed in the previous unit. Most welcome are her questions about how coins should be read—in essence, a numismatic hermeneutic—and her attention to the conflation of imperial and divine personae. It is understandable that she cannot prioritize every important artifact, as when her reference to a coin celebrating the advent of Nero goes unelaborated and unillustrated. Like the volume’s other chapters, her work is otherwise thoroughly illustrated and detailed. Jorunn Økland shares Thomas’s earlier concerns about the importance of language in cultic expression: in Økland’s persuasive view, the ‘personality definition’ of the goddesses Demeter/Ceres and Kore/Proserpina/Persephone hinges upon ‘the language in which they were worshipped, on the identity of the worshippers, and on the other deities with whom they were worshipped’ (p. 199). Their semiotic characterization is bound to questions of Roman appropriation, theology, and the anthropology of worshipping communities. The goddesses’ representative power for women may well have shifted with the elision of the traditional names that spelled out their mother-daughter relationships; but conflicting data at their sanctuary shows that this elision was incomplete and contested in Corinth. Friesen returns with an argument against the traditional equation of the *οἰκονόμος* Erastus in Rom. 16.23 with the aristocrat (*aedile*) of the same name noted in a well-known Latin inscription. Regardless of whether one agrees with him, Friesen’s ‘attempt to disentangle us from the recent history of interpretation and its fascination with upward mobility’ (p. 231) should be applauded, as it recalls the ‘downward mobility’ Paul models on Christ, as in Philippians 2. Michael Walbank’s review of Christian gravestone fragments is a reference book in miniature. It provides profiles of the careers mentioned (e.g. a δοῦλος αὐτοκράτορος ‘was evidently a senior imperial official during the reign of the Emperor Justinian. The term δοῦλος here by no means indicates that he was a slave’, p. 275) and an appended census that includes all the data under scrutiny and livens up a rather dry subject. However, Walbank’s heading of ‘Religious Officials’ (pp. 275-80) runs counter to this volume’s integrative goals with regard to the categories of religion and society.

Co-editors Schowalter and Walters lead the third unit, ‘Local Religion’, presenting chapters on Paul’s letters vis-à-vis evidence for possible Corinthian house churches, and the politics of hosting meals, respectively. Schowalter worries that prior attempts to read ‘the archaeological record with an eye to explaining some aspect of the

biblical text' have come to be seen as material evidence for those 'seeking to demonstrate the accuracy and even inerrancy' of the text (p. 330); in short, scholarly findings that support a desirable conclusion become proof texts, even gospel truth, to later interpreters and readers. Schowalter does not discredit imaginative thinking about the placement of Paul's church(es); he asks only that such prospects not become paradigms that prohibit subsequent revision. Walters argues that Paul's instructions on the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11 served to circumscribe the influence exerted by his rivals. Beginning with the context of colonial regulations on electioneering, he posits meals as a 'tangible context' in which social status was demarcated and honour shown or contended (p. 356). Paul's own physical absence is crucial here, as is his stratagem: 'by underscoring that Jesus himself is the host of the community meal, Paul rhetorically supplants the Corinthian hosts who might use meals to supplant him' (p. 359). Walters's argument is well taken, but the question of a physically absent host (whether Jesus or Paul) should have raised the issue of Caesar as the ultimate host within the Roman patronal network. That is, *two* absent lords are socio-rhetorically present in Corinth; in the course of theological electioneering, whose presence will the Corinthians choose to celebrate? As Michael Knowles stated recently, is it the Lord's Supper that they eat, or Caesar salad?

Guy Sanders's investigation of the mythos of Corinth's sacred spring issues from a reconsideration of the landscape: he theorizes that the site was dedicated to a 'chthonic deity with watery associations' (pp. 374, 386). Quite plausibly this was Artemis, whose duality as a 'safe' (*artemis*) yet also a 'butcher' (*artamos*) goddess situated her as a protector at major life events such as birth and marriage (pp. 361, 387-88). Her spring might well have been a place for commemorating and/or prayer for these events, in such a way as would explain the few physical traces left behind.

In 'Religion and Society at Roman Kenchreai', Joseph Rife finds Corinth's port on the Saronic Gulf to be 'largely a formation of the Roman era' (p. 396), without the Greco-Roman hybridity found in its parent city's archaeological record. The harbour town appears to have begun to flourish with the revival of the Isthmian Games in the mid-first century CE, but it was neither autonomous nor permitted to mint its own coinage. So Rife must look for evidence other than numismatics to support his study on the cults of Aphrodite, Isis and others. He shows

model respect for the locality of Corinth and Kenchreai, as reflected in the use of specific epithets among the ‘bountiful polynomy’ that characterized Isis (p. 409) and the attention to the (usually) liminal ways in which Pan’s image was displayed (pp. 419-21). A brief elaboration might have helped his point on the manner in which later Christians both ‘respected’ and ‘appropriated’ earlier monuments (p. 431).

The final study, Timothy Gregory’s ‘Religion and Society in the Roman Eastern Corinthia’, concerns not so much religion and society per se as it does the archaeological findings that might fund such studies. Carefully constructed charts help guide readers through the amounts of artifacts found on the Corinthian isthmus from the Classical through the late medieval period, leading to an important extrapolation: the Early Roman artifacts outnumber the Classical. This leads Gregory to question traditional characterizations of the Early Roman period as an economic ‘downturn’ (p. 448)—a shrewd choice of words, in light of current global events. Gregory is cautiously optimistic about the ‘natural and reasonable endeavor’ of reading archaeological data alongside Pauline texts, so long as we remember that it is simplistic to ask the data to ‘confirm or contradict individual narratives’ (pp. 473, 474). His own provisional conclusions point to a possible religious conflict between the polytheism of Hellenistic cults (with attendant traditions, such as the Isthmian Games) and Christianity, an engagement perhaps both more antagonistic and agonistic than previously thought.

To demonstrate the potential for engagement with these papers, we return to Millis’s essay. His study implies that Rome’s official story of having ‘refounded’ Corinth is a gloss of a more culturally complex truth. This in turn should lead us to a question that limitations of space do not allow Millis himself to address fully: what did it mean to be Roman, to exhibit the quality of *romanitas*, in such a hybrid context? One can agree with the essayist that choices of language reflected and informed the ‘cultural affiliation’ of Corinthians ‘significantly invested’ in imperial culture (pp. 28, 32), but that in turn triggers other queries. Though it would be difficult to ascertain exclusively from Millis’s onomastic evidence, what capital (if any) did Rome earn from determining Corinth’s cultural identity? That is, among Rome’s authorized historiographers—the Straboes, Appians and Plutarchs whom Millis cites—did there not exist a consistent, if often implicit, effort to define the boundaries and the state of the *oikouμένη*, Rome’s *right* to define it, and the essence (i.e. *romanitas*) of those who could participate in it and

that (*peregrinitas*, foreign-ness) of those who remained outside in some sense? If Rome claimed the divine right to determine ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ status, then those Corinthians who chose a different ‘cultural affiliation’ in private than in public were resisting the empire in a manner that might have left them open to Paul’s proclamation of a lord other than Caesar.

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