

THE URBAN WORLD AND THE FIRST CHRISTIANS



Steve Walton | Paul R. Trebilco | David W. J. Gill

editors

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Edited by

Steve Walton

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and

David W. J. Gill

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Abbreviations

Other than those listed below, abbreviations used are those found in Billie Jean Collins, Bob Buller, and John F. Kutsko, eds., *The SBL Handbook of Style: For Biblical Studies and Related Disciplines*, 2nd ed. (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014).

ABib	Academia Biblica
ABSA	Annual of the British School at Athens
AJEC	Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity
<i>Am. Anthropol.</i>	<i>American Anthropologist</i>
<i>ArtB</i>	<i>Art Bulletin</i>
AYBRL	Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library
BAR.I	British Archaeological Reports, International Series
BEHE.H	Bibliothèque de l'école des hautes études. Sciences historiques et philologiques
BHGNT	Baylor Handbook on the Greek New Testament
<i>BICS</i>	<i>Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies</i>
BICSSup	<i>Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies</i> Supplement Series
BSASup	British School at Athens Supplement Series
BST	The Bible Speaks Today
CbNT	Commentaire biblique: Nouveau Testament
CCEL	Christian Classics Ethereal Library
CMRDM	E. N. Lane, <i>Corpus monumentorum religionis dei Menis</i> . 4 vols. Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'Empire romain 19. Leiden: Brill, 1971–1978.

COQG	Christian Origins and the Question of God
CR	<i>Classical Review</i>
<i>Cult. Geogr.</i>	<i>Cultural Geography</i>
EaChrCon	Early Christianity in Context
EC	Epworth Commentaries
ENT	Erläuterungen zum Neuen Testament
<i>Env. Plan. A</i>	<i>Environment and Planning A</i>
<i>Env. Plan. D</i>	<i>Environment and Planning D</i>
<i>Geogr. Ann. B</i>	<i>Geografiska Annaler Series B</i>
<i>Geogr. Compass</i>	<i>Geography Compass</i>
<i>Hist. Theory</i>	<i>History and Theory</i>
HTA	Historisch-theologische Auslegung
IGSK	Inschriften griechischer Städte aus Kleinasien
<i>Int. J. Urb. Reg. Res.</i>	<i>International Journal of Urban and Regional Research</i>
<i>IvEph</i>	Hermann Wankel et al., <i>Die Inschriften von Ephesos</i> . IGSK 11.1–17.4. Bonn: Rudolf Habelt, 1979–1984.
<i>JAJ</i>	<i>Journal of Ancient Judaism</i>
JRASup	<i>Journal of Roman Archaeology</i> Supplementary Series
<i>JSHJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus</i>
LHJS	Library of Historical Jesus Studies
MAPS	Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society
MEFRA	<i>Mélanges de l'école française de Rome: Antiquité</i>
NHMS	Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies
NIVAC	New International Version Application Commentary
NVBS	New Voices in Biblical Studies
PAPS	<i>Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society</i>
PBM	Paternoster Biblical Monographs
<i>Prog. Hum. Geogr.</i>	<i>Progress in Human Geography</i>
SCJ	<i>Stone-Campbell Journal</i>
<i>Soc. Cult. Geogr.</i>	<i>Social and Cultural Geography</i>
<i>Sociol. Relig.</i>	<i>Sociology of Religion</i>
<i>Trans. Inst. Br. Geog.</i>	<i>Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers</i>
<i>Urban Geogr.</i>	<i>Urban Geography</i>
<i>Urban Stud.</i>	<i>Urban Studies</i>
VCSup	Supplements to <i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>
ZECNT	Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament

Cities as More Than “Scenery”

THE EDITORS

1. Introduction

Cities were key places in the establishment, growth, and development of earliest Christianity, and they have continued to be so throughout history. This book seeks to explore the relationship between the earliest Christian believers and the city environment by focusing on two areas. First, we look at how the urban environments of the ancient Mediterranean basin affected the ways in which early Christianity progressed; secondly, we reflect on how the earliest Christians thought and theologized in their engagement with cities and urban environments, which could be challenging and difficult as well as open and receptive.

To approach these areas fruitfully requires the tools and expertise of more than one discipline, and to this end we here bring together studies by human geographers, who have rigorous ways of studying urban settings, and classicists, who know the ancient world and its cities, as well as New Testament scholars of various interests and approaches, whose texts speak of the early Christian stories and reflections. The essays in this book were originally presented at a multidisciplinary conference hosted by the Centre for the Social-Scientific Study of the Bible at St Mary’s University, Twickenham (London), UK, in May 2015, and the cross-fertilization between different perspectives within the conference has contributed helpfully to the revised essays that you see here. Thus, readers will find in these pages a rich variety of expertise and scholarship, all focused on our key questions about cities and earliest Christianity.

2. Early Christianity in Its Ancient Urban Setting(s)

Part I focuses on our first area, the impact of cities on earliest Christianity. Some scholars argue that the Greek word *Ioudaios*, traditionally translated “Jew,” would better be translated “Judean,” partly to guard against the danger of “reading back” modern Judaism into our ancient sources. *Anthony Le Donne* enters this debate and considers how ethnic groups were identified in the first century. He argues that first-century people were identified by their connection with a mother city, and thus that the identity of *Ioudaioi* came from their connection with Jerusalem, rather than their “ethnicity” in today’s terms. *Matthew Sleeman* keeps the spotlight on Jerusalem by considering Paul’s final visit to the city in Acts 21. Sleeman brings expertise as both a human geographer and a NT scholar to this enterprise, and uses ideas from legal geography to consider how Paul seeks to remake spaces he enters as places where the heavenly Christ is known to dwell and reign. *Joan Taylor*’s essay keeps us with Paul in Acts by considering Caesarea Maritima, a city mentioned many times in Acts, and a place where Paul was held under arrest for two years. Taylor shows how our archaeological and other evidence portrays Caesarea as a city that “performed” Rome, and how these data illuminate the narrative of Acts.

David Gill casts the net wider, using his classical learning to inform our reading of the developments of earliest Christianity in key Roman colonies in the Greek East of the empire: Corinth, Philippi, and Pisidian Antioch. He shows how knowledge from the ancient world meshes with texts from Acts, Galatians, and 1 Corinthians, illustrating the tensions and issues that arose as believing communities were established in these Roman cities. *Jutta Leonhardt-Balzer* extends our thinking on Paul and cities by comparing and contrasting Paul’s attitudes to Jerusalem and Rome with those of a contemporary Hellenistic Jew, Philo of Alexandria. In both men she detects an ambivalence, to varying degrees and with varying emphases, between valuing Jerusalem as “mother city” and being independent of that city, and between seeing Rome as strategically and politically important and adopting a cautious approach to Rome’s power and claims. *Volker Rabens* considers how Paul approached his mission, to make Christ known, in the urban settings of the first-century Roman Empire, discussing how Paul chose the cities he visited and how he acted once he arrived in a city. Rabens argues that Paul was no mere pragmatist, but that his highly flexible practice and missiological principles were closely interlocked.

A series of studies then consider Christian engagement with particu-

lar cities. *Cédric Brélaz* uses data from recent French archaeological work in Philippi to recontextualize Paul's mission in this city, which Acts designates—unusually—as a Roman colony (16:12). *Helen Morris* examines Paul's use of “body” imagery in 1 Cor 12:12–31 for the believing communities, and she compares and contrasts it with the use of the “body” in the context of cities to encourage social harmony. Morris argues that Paul regards the city of Corinth as neither “friend” (uncritically accepted) nor “foe” (unbendingly opposed), but as a foil to his argument—the eschatological tension within which the church lives produces elements of both conformity and subversion in Christian engagement with the city-state. *Paul Trebilco* compares and contrasts two different early Christian approaches to the city of Ephesus, those found among the Pauline communities (attested by 1 and 2 Timothy) and among the Johannine communities (attested by 1, 2, and 3 John). Trebilco identifies a significant contrast between engagement and withdrawal (respectively) as the default mode of relating to the city and society of Ephesus and elucidates the rationale and practice of these two Christian approaches. *Chris Keith* takes us to Rome in the second century, through the eyes of Justin Martyr and Hermas, to consider how widespread literacy and literate education were in that city, against the backdrop of the common scholarly claim that there was much greater literacy in urban settings. He argues that the evidence runs against a straightforward correlation, and he uses the discussion to critique some reconstructions of early Christian transmission of their traditions through written notes. *Piotr Ashwin-Siejkowski* stays in the later centuries with a focus on the growth of Christianity in Alexandria in Egypt. He identifies features of the city's life that made it fertile soil for the planting and growth of believing communities: its intellectual legacy, its urban institutions (such as libraries), and its geographical location.

3. Early Christian Thinking about Cities

Part II turns to consider how the earliest Christians regarded cities in general, and some specific cities in particular. *Anders Runesson* considers Matthew's portrait of Jerusalem, which has alternatively been argued to be either “city of God” or home of traitors and killers. He walks carefully through the evidence to offer a fresh perspective that recognizes that the “first urban Christians” were located outside Jerusalem and Judea. *Steve Walton* considers the use of “heavenly citizenship” language in Philippians in relation to Paul's use of his Roman citizenship in Philippi, and he argues that this lan-

guage indicates Paul as appropriating “city” language that was well-known to the inhabitants of Philippi and its environs but applying it to the believing communities as outposts of the heavenly city. *Paul Cloke* applies models of “spiritual landscapes” from modern human geography to reading the letter to the Colossians, noticing ways in which the Roman Empire maintained its colonial control over the city, the presence of invisible “spiritual” powers in the city for which Paul offers “alternative imaginaries,” and the faithful improvisation of life into which the believing community was being called by God-in-Christ. *David Horrell*, in conversation with the human geographers Edward Soja and David Harvey, reflects on the setting of 1 Peter by considering how the letter constructs space. This approach allows him to elucidate the letter’s view of the believers’ situation living under the Roman Empire, a view elucidated by an alternative way of seeing reality, an alternative geography. *Wei Hsien Wan* explores 1 Peter further by considering how imperial cults configured physical and ideological space under Roman domination. Wan contrasts the Roman construction of space with the “spiritual house” to which believers belong, which allows them to resist the romanization of space and relocates them in a new spatial reality as a dwelling place for the Spirit. *Ian Paul* considers the seven cities of Revelation 2–3 in the wider context of the two cities of Babylon and the new Jerusalem. Paul presents the seven cities as the arena of discipleship, whereas the two cities make mutually incompatible claims on people’s loyalty.

4. Conclusion

We would like to thank our publisher, Eerdmans, and especially our editor Michael Thomson, for their collaboration in producing this book. We are also very grateful to all of the contributors who have patiently answered the many questions we have had. Dave Smith, then a PhD student at St Mary’s University, Twickenham, did sterling work in compiling the consolidated bibliography, and we thank him for his labors. The Centre for the Social-Scientific Study of the Bible, to which Steve Walton belongs, under the fine leadership of its director, Professor Chris Keith, proved to be a very congenial location for this project, and we acknowledge with thanks the support of the Centre and the university’s vice-chancellor, Francis Campbell.