

Yet Clytaemnestra treated him as
she did not because she was a woman,
but because she was a wicked woman;
and there is no more reason for not
being kind to a woman than to a man.¹

2

WOMEN AND CLASS IN THE ROMAN EMPIRE, I

An analysis of the women in Luke–Acts according to the theme of falling and rising must begin with a description² of the social classes of the Greco-Roman world and of women’s location in them. And to facilitate this description, one goal serves as guide: to tell the story of the lives of women in the first century and in the Greek East. This chapter and chapter 3 present the first of the four groups of women mentioned in chapter 1, as we move closer to our target group—those women whom Luke exalts and esteems at all costs, even at the expense of men.

¹Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 74.19, trans. Crosby, LCL 5.229. For a discussion of this passage, see Arlandson, “‘Fall and Rise,’” 78 n. 1.

²I adopt the terminology used by Ste. Croix, *Class Struggle*, 91–96. As he attempts to clarify Finley’s use of status as a tool for analyzing ancient society, he sees status as valid only for a *description* of society, not for an *explanation* why society behaves as it does. Omitting the debate over status, I readily admit that in chs. 2 and 3 I adopt the approach of a description of women in Greco-Roman culture, not an explanation. That is, I describe women in their various classes (e.g., that they lived this way, that they usually were behind the men in their own class, that they had these political rights but not those, etc.); my *explanation* is reserved for chs. 4 and 5, where I offer for Luke’s portrayal of women possible reasons and causes that are based on my description of women in chs. 2 and 3.

In this survey, information about men in their respective classes will be included. It is a common complaint today that the ancient documents were written from a male viewpoint and thereby skewed from representing “how things really were.”³ Even a cursory reading of the sources cannot contradict this complaint. In the ancient world, however, the lives of women were invariably tied to the lives of men.⁴ If it turns out, for instance, that women were excluded from official, legislative powers, then in order to determine what this means, male power structures will have to be discussed. But we need studiously to avoid—or, at most, treat of lightly in most instances, though not all—those passages in which elite male authors consciously wax eloquent about women. In these ramblings the men almost always suppress women. Instead, the focus will be on offhanded references about women. Used judiciously, these passages hold out the greatest hope of being reliable for describing women’s involvement in any area of life in the first century.

The chronological and geographical limitations of this descriptive survey should be clarified. While staying mostly within the first century of our era, this study will appeal to earlier and later data if they reflect daily life in the first century.⁵ For example, inscriptions of female political officeholders in Asia Minor not only from the first but from the second and third centuries C.E. will be included because they are a culmination of a general trend beginning as far back as the Hellenistic period.⁶

³See R. Van Bremen, “Women and Wealth,” in *Images of Women in Antiquity* (ed. A. Cameron and A. Kuhrt; London: Croom Helm, 1983) 234; Stagg, *Woman*, 55–100; and Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Churches*, 5–23, for a survey of some of the literary references.

⁴For further discussion, see Arlandson, “‘Fall and Rise,’ ” 78 n. 4.

⁵One of the striking facts about classics historians is their use of data ranging from the Hellenistic to the late Roman periods in order to illuminate a point in, say, the first century. All of the historians are aware of the differences time and location can cause, but they judiciously make use of any datum they can. I hope to be as judicious. In most aspects of life in the Greco-Roman world, the transition between the first and second centuries is not a magical threshold differing radically from the 80s, the assumed date of Luke–Acts, especially in Asia Minor, where prosperity grew steadily for some centuries before and after the first century. I will try, however, to avoid data that differ from those in our period of study, as one might expect to find, say, in Palestine after the fall of Jerusalem. Whenever I use second-century authors as resources, such as Lucian (ca. 120–190), Aristides (118–ca. 180), and Pausanias (ca. 120–180), I am choosing only information that can apply to other centuries in the ancient world. See Ilan, *Jewish Women*, 22–43, for a discussion of how to use ancient sources.

⁶D. Magie, *Roman Rule in Asia Minor to the End of the Third Century after Christ* (2 vols.; Princeton: Princeton, 1950) 1.649, 2.1518 n. 50.

When Luke composed his dual work, he used the countryside of Palestine for most of the background of the Gospel, and Jerusalem and the cities of Asia Minor, Greece, Achaia, Macedonia, and Thrace for most of the background of Acts.⁷ His plan will be followed, with one further geographical limitation: besides Jerusalem, the cities in Asia Minor are chosen over those in the other regions. The cities in Asia Minor are given priority because it is assumed that Luke possibly wrote in Asia Minor. And according to Luke, Paul and his team preached in more cities in Asia Minor than in other eastern regions. But just as data from earlier or later periods are used, so data from other regions are included when they shed light on urban and rural life in Asia Minor and Palestine. Some things in the Roman Empire did not change from one region to the next, such as farming technology, the amount of crops six acres could produce, and the hard life of the poverty-stricken, unskilled urban laborer and other occupations.⁸

A MACROSOCIAL MODEL FOR SOCIAL CLASS

Determining class structure in modern societies is a tenuous enterprise. The articles and books on the subject are many, even quite unmanageable, indicating that this area of the social sciences is still open to debate. And if modern, observable societies are difficult to classify, then a fortiori Greco-Roman society is difficult. These difficulties emerge because of the barrier of time and because the surviving evidence is scarce and mostly emanates, with exceptions, from the economically and politically powerful. Any attempt at understanding the Greco-Roman world and its class structure should proceed with caution. Therefore, the reader will notice the frequent use of qualifiers, such as “probably,” “likely,” and “perhaps,” throughout these two chapters.

⁷The distinctions between urban and rural people are vast and many. It is to our advantage to examine at least two of the three societies—urban, rural, and semirural—since the ancients viewed them as separate and since the issue will touch on the idea of status. Strabo 13.1.25, trans. Jones, LCL 6.47, says, “there is a certain difference among these of the rustics [ἀγροίκων, *agroikōn*], the semi-rustics [μεσαγροίκων, *mesagroikōn*], and the city-dwellers [πολιτικῶν, *politikōn*].” I do not see the need to discuss fully the semirural. See, however, ch. 3, “Landowners,” pp. 70–71.

⁸“The occupations of Palestinian Jews were the same, on average, as those in other Mediterranean countries” (E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 BCE–66 CE* [Philadelphia: Trinity, 1992] 119). For further discussion of these chronological and geographical limitations, see Arlandson, “‘Fall and Rise,’” 80 n. 9.

One of the major hindrances to a consensus over classes is the difficulty of finding the criteria for measuring a person's social location. This volume gives the works of Runciman and Lenski special weight and priority. These two sociologists provide our macro-sociological framework for a more detailed inquiry of the daily lives of women. Runciman eliminates some of the confusion, for our purposes at least, when he keeps a multidimensional approach to stratification yet limits the dimensions to three: class, status, and power. He allows some freedom for the detailed filling out of these three interdependent criteria.

By "class" Runciman means wealth, access to the markets and the means of production, or the lack thereof.⁹ The more specific word "wealth," with an emphasis on occupation—or access to wealth—and social condition (or lack thereof for widows and beggars), will be used in our survey instead of "class" in order to avoid confusion. The phrase "access to wealth," though nebulous, must be kept in addition to "occupation" because it can hardly be maintained that a wealthy landowner who engaged in politics had an occupation. That said, however, the emphasis will be placed on occupation and social condition as a means of discussing wealth because the Greco-Roman world, the NT, and Luke–Acts saw people in this way, as the title, epithet, or occupational description next to their name indicates: proconsul, purple-seller, landowner (all of whom manipulated a lot of wealth); tent-maker, widow, farmer, day laborer (all of whom had very little control over wealth). A person's occupation or means of creating capital (or lack thereof) will be understood in these two chapters as one of the factors considered in determining a person's social location. So "class" will serve as the genus, and "wealth" or "occupation" will serve as two of the species of "class."

Runciman joins status with esteem, prestige, privilege, birth, etc.¹⁰ Status is necessary as a criterion because in a few cases a person's wealth did not match his or her status. The ubiquitous and protean slave is usually cited as the prime example of a person who, attached to a wealthy household, may have access to fabulous wealth but no status. In contrast, the freeholder of a farm of few acres may possess higher status but is struggling to survive economically.¹¹ Still, status is a notoriously subjective concept, with few objective indicators in the ancient world.¹² So it will be referred to only when there is enough information.

⁹Runciman, "Class," 30, 38.

¹⁰Ibid., 30, 43–48.

¹¹Finley, *Ancient Economy*, 62–63.

¹²For a further discussion of objective status and subjective status, see S. M. Lipset, "Social Stratification" *IESS*, 15.310–15.

Finally, power is linked with a person's ability to bring about his or her wishes or, conversely, the ability to avoid the control of others.¹³ This definition is a little too broad, so it is narrowed down to political power. In the ancient world money and political power went hand in hand, despite the rare exceptions: some men were so wealthy that they could avoid holding public office and all the expense it entailed.¹⁴ Power should play a part in a theory about stratification because sometimes wealth followed behind power, as when the military machine of Rome was conquering Asia Minor and Palestine. And at other times power followed wealth and status, as in a case of daughters who inherit their father's wealth and legal status in the shipping business and grow up to wield the power needed to guard the same wealth or access to the market their father had.¹⁵

As it turns out, this trilogy of interdependent criteria for locating a person socially receives independent confirmation from two sources: the first-century essayist and biographer Plutarch (before 50–after 120 C.E., Boeotia), and the orator Dio Chrysostom (ca. 40–120 C.E., Bithynia), who traveled extensively through the Greek East and beyond. They often wrote about proper social attitudes.

In the context of the assembly and other formal meetings, Plutarch notes that politicians were profoundly aware of these three concepts in order to rank the value of a man's proposal.

So, too, in an assemblage or a formal meeting they may be observed to begin a subject of discussion, and later to give ground as though before their betters, and to shift over with the utmost readiness to the other side, if the man opposing them be a person of power [δυνατός, *dynatos*], wealth [πλούσιος, *plousios*] or repute [ἔνδοξος, *endoxos*].¹⁶

In another essay Plutarch counsels his readers to adopt good cheer with their wealth, reputation, and power.

And wealth [πλοῦτος, *ploutos*] is pleasanter, and repute [δόξα, *doxa*] and power [δύναμις, *dynamis*] more resplendent, if with them goes the gladness which springs from the heart.¹⁷

And in one of Plutarch's essays about philosophers and men in power, he sees the three criteria almost as commodities that can be manipulated for achieving social esteem.

¹³ Runciman, "Class," 48–53.

¹⁴ P. Garnsey, *Social Status and Legal Privilege in the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970) 257.

¹⁵ A. H. M. Jones, *The Greek City* (New York: Oxford, 1940) 180.

¹⁶ Plutarch, *Mor.* 58C-D, trans. Babbitt, LCL 1.313.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 100D, trans. Babbitt, LCL 2.95.

But the man of sense, if he is engaged in active political life, will ask for so much reputation [δόξης, *doxēs*] as will inspire confidence and thereby give him power [δύναμιν, *dynamin*] for affairs. . . . But even he [who has withdrawn from public life] does not despise reputation [δόξαν, *doxan*] among the right-minded and estimable; but wealth [πλοῦτον, *plouton*], reputation [δόξαν] as a leader, or power [δύναμιν] in his friendships he does not pursue, however neither does he avoid these qualities if they are associated with a temperate character.¹⁸

Dio likens the philosopher to a physician who has to be severe in his treatment of the sick when the illness becomes advanced. For this reason the philosopher never gains wealth (χρήματα, *chrēmata*) or power (δύναμις). Instead, he receives hatred, abuse, and reviling—a bad reputation, in effect.¹⁹

When class tension erupted in Tarsus between the wealthy, those in the assembly, and the so-called linen-workers, who were outside the constitution because they did not have enough money to buy a political voice, Dio cites examples of entire cities engaged in strife and enmity, notably Athens and Sparta after the Persian Wars, so that he can show and thereby curtail destructive civic strife. Dio describes the process at the time when Athens began to lose control of its empire. “The first thing of all to happen was to lose their commendation [ἔπαινον, *epainon*] and good repute [εὐφημίαν, *euphēmian*], and next to lose their power [ἰσχύν, *ischyn*] and wealth [χρήματα].”²⁰ These three criteria are valid for socially locating not only Athens and Sparta in macropolitics but also individuals in micropolitics.

In all of these passages from Plutarch and Dio, ἔνδοξος, δόξα, εὐφημία, and ἔπαινος, can signify more than reputation. They can mean opinion, estimation, honor, and glory, as these touch on the public’s view of a person. All of these definitions are aligned with the notion of social status mentioned earlier.

Plutarch’s and Dio’s choice of criteria confirms, rather than determines or controls, the choice of the criteria in the present study (and Runciman’s study). Plutarch and Dio should not be regarded as infallible guides in such matters, as if they were modern sociologists. On the other hand, they were keen observers of social relations and should not be lightly dismissed. These three criteria do not always occur with such convenience in the same context in ancient literature, but they recur throughout. Plutarch and Dio, out of their keen

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 778A, trans. Fowler, LCL 10.39.

¹⁹ Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 32.19, LCL 3.191.

²⁰ Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 34.50, trans. Crosby, LCL 3.383. For a discussion of the civic strife between the wealthy, the assemblymen, and the linen workers, see *Or.* 34.21–23 and, in the present work, ch. 3, “Artisans,” p. 85.

observation of social relations, summarized them and reduced them to their simplest forms.

In *Power and Prestige* Lenski first examines sociological issues common to all societies, then chronologically surveys the developments of societies. He begins with hunting-and-gathering societies, shifts to surveying simple and advanced horticultural societies, then agrarian societies, and ends with industrial societies. Our interest is focused on the agrarian societies, of which, he says, the Roman Empire is a prime example because of its advancement in production and general technology (mainly through the plow), compared to horticultural societies, and in military technology.²¹

As Lenski adumbrates the well-known story of the growth of the empire, two salient features stand out. First, advancements in military technology inevitably led to expanding borders, which in turn led to a social cleavage between the rulers and the ruled.²² As borders expanded, the government became more and more centralized, culminating in the emergence of the emperors. The major source of revenue, the land, fell into fewer and fewer hands. Land should be considered the major source of revenue because it was the almost exclusive domain in which production took place. (The huge manufacturing conglomerates and financial institutions found today did not exist.) Confirming Lenski's assessment of this bifurcation, R. MacMullen, in an extraordinarily lucid statement, compresses five centuries of Roman ascendancy into three words: "fewer have more."²³ And the opposite is equally true: more have less. Thus, Rome deliberately became the patron to all other local governments in the provinces, such as the decurion councils in the major cities of Asia Minor, and engendered and fostered a social cleavage.

Second, the centralized rulers had to develop policies by which they could maintain their vast empire, so they sent legates and representatives and their helpers or retainers to various urban centers in order to keep the peace and to make sure the revenues were collected. When Rome sent its representatives to urban centers and permitted local governments to exercise real power, the cities and larger towns augmented their permanence, wealth, and prestige, which had been missing in many of the advanced horticultural societies.²⁴ A prominent classics historian summarizes the prosperity of Roman Asia Minor in these terms:

²¹ Lenski, *Power*, 192–94, 198.

²² *Ibid.*, 194.

²³ MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations*, 38.

²⁴ Lenski, *Power*, 198.

If the period of Augustus and the Julio-Claudians gives the impression of a gradual and sound recovery from a time of great distress, that of the Flavians and Antonines creates one of widespread and general prosperity. If the first saw a good beginning of the Greco-Roman municipal forms and Hellenic culture . . . the next saw the continuation and culmination of the movement, which reached its maximum strength for the pre-Diocletian period with Marcus Aurelius.²⁵

Thus, because of the “widespread and general prosperity” of the urban centers, a diversity of vocations and occupations developed: bureaucrats, scholars, scribes, soldiers, merchants, servants, numerous “guilds” of artisans, laborers, the working poor, and even beggars.²⁶ This development of numerous occupations prompts a description of class structure and women’s place in it.

By means of a graph Lenski illustrates class structure in agrarian societies. In the present study his graph is adapted and modified according to other scholars’ analyses of it²⁷ and according to other studies of the Greco-Roman period. Before presenting our adaptation (fig. 1), its limitation and purposes should be mentioned.²⁸

As cognitive perception of landscape can take place from the air at several thousand meters, so one can view societies from a distance. A model that represents a view from a long distance does not “simulate an exact appearance of things that are perceived.” Instead, it simplifies “only important representative aspects of complex social structures, behavior and relations.”²⁹ So our adaptation of Lenski’s model is not intended to be a detailed representation of Greco-Roman culture; rather, it is only a bird’s-eye view.

With that limitation in mind, it serves four functions: (1) It will help us to see the interrelations of groups within the Roman Empire at a more general and abstract level. In this survey some specific cases of persons within groups are examined as the groups interact with each other in a struggle over limited economic, reputational, and political resources, but this is done only with (2) the purpose of illustrating the lives of women in the larger society. (3) Following Lenski, our diagram clarifies a misconception about stratification in agrarian societies. Classes are not “layers superimposed on each

²⁵T. R. S. Broughton, “Roman Asia Minor,” in *An Economic Survey of Ancient Rome* (ed. F. Tenney; Baltimore: John Hopkins, 1938; reprint, Paterson, N.J.: Pagent Books, 1959) 4.794.

²⁶Lenski, *Power*, 201.

²⁷Duling, “Matthew’s,” 99–106; Fiensy, *Social*, 155–76.

²⁸Duling, “Matthew’s,” 99–100, commenting on Lenski’s graph or model, has a fine survey of the purpose and limitations of his own version of the graph. I base my discussion on his.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 99.

other”; they touch a range in the supply of the three limited resources of wealth, power, and status and overlap each other to some degree. There is a continuum of the three resources, not “a series of separate and distinct strata in the geological sense.” Many of the borders, far from being sharp, are unclear or, for lack of information, unknown. (4) Classes are not best depicted in a pyramid that “ignores the depressed classes at the very bottom of the social order and minimizes the degree of inequality.”³⁰ Thus, Lenski’s model has the advantage of distinguishing two subsocieties at the very bottom from the bulk of the population. The graphs of Lenski and others who follow him are, however, inadequate because they draw the graphs in the shape of a diamond, which implies that the social gap between the rich and poor was more gradual than it really was. In Greco-Roman society the difference between the elite and “all the rest” was very wide, as shown in our adaptation of his model.

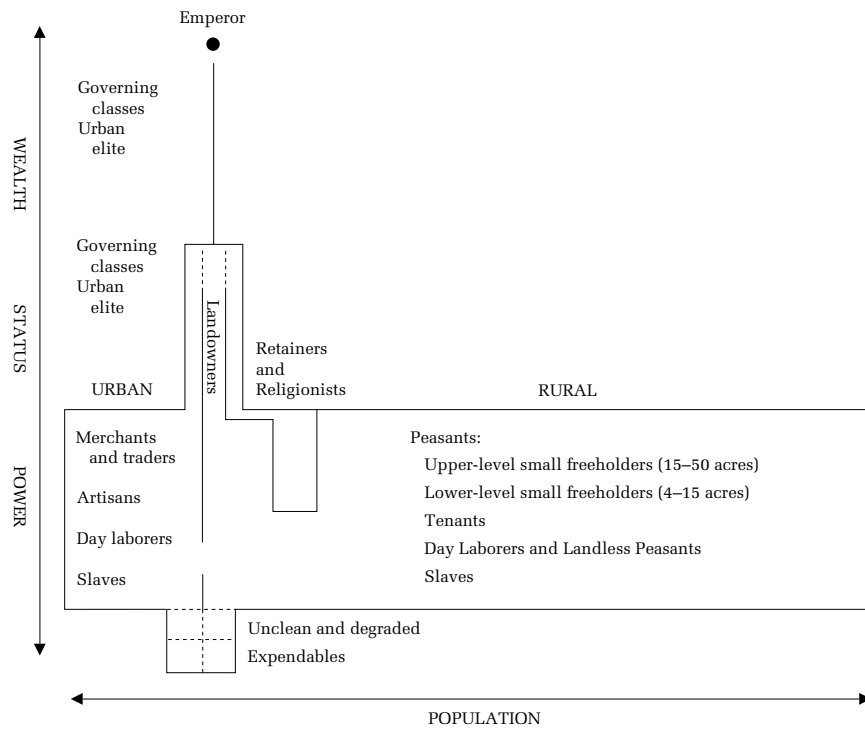


Figure 1

³⁰Lenski, *Power*, 285.

A few general comments on the physical outlay of the graph are required. Its shape resembles **L**. Summarizing his own survey of class structure in the Roman Empire, MacMullen says that “‘verticality’ is key to the understanding of it.”³¹ This can easily be applied to our model. The vast majority of people lived just a little above or at poverty level with little or no status and power—somewhere in the widest portion of the graph³²—while a very small minority benefited from great wealth, status, and power. Very few lived in between. Indeed, Lenski claims that the page length limits his graph because it should have “a spire far higher and far slenderer.”³³ In our graph the page width also limits it because the population in the widest portion was far more numerous than the model is able to show. The right side of the **L**, representing the rural sphere, is longer than the left side, representing the urban sphere, because most Mediterraneans lived outside the large metropoleis and in small towns and villages.

Inside the model, lines block off various domains—e.g., between rural and urban, and retainers and peasants—because not many people crossed over into new careers and jobs. Aelius Aristides (117–ca. 180 C.E.), who lived in Smyrna but owned estates in Mysia, observes,

Those who were yesterday shoemakers and carpenters are not today infantry and cavalrymen, nor as on the stage is one transformed into a soldier who was just now a farmer. Nor as in a poor home where the same people do the cooking and keep the house and make the beds, have you mixed your occupations.³⁴

A few persons did cross boundaries, however, such as wealthy merchants and proconsuls’ faithful assistants (retainers), all of whom could accumulate enough wealth to acquire land, and the day laborers who migrated from the city to the country or back again, depending on where jobs were found. In these cases there are gaps in the boundaries. The lines above the unclean and degraded and the expendables are very porous because if social mobility existed at all, then it was almost exclusively downward.

Finally, two words appear to be anachronistic, “retainers” and “expendables.” All the others listed in the model can be found in

³¹MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations*, 94.

³²Placing poverty in the widest portion of the model can be exasperatingly vague, but not much information exists to offer more precision. In this study “poverty” is defined as the condition of a person who barely subsists from day to day, earns only enough money to feed himself and his family and to take care of a few basic needs, and lives without hope of setting aside some resources to improve his lot in life.

³³Lenski, *Power*, 285.

³⁴Aristides, *Or.* 26.71, Behr 2.81.

Greco-Roman literature either directly, such as “slaves,” or through synonyms. It will become clear that the words “retainers” and “expendables” are merely tools to describe historical reality: the first describes a class that the rulers employed to carry out their will and policies; the second, argues Lenski, describes people, found in every agrarian society, “for whom the other members of society had little or no need.”³⁵ Anyone vaguely familiar with the Gospels should recognize that they acknowledge the existence of expendables. Jesus ministered to them, and chapters 4 and 5 will argue that the women whom Luke exalts at the *expense* of powerful, honorable, and wealthy men come from the *expendables* and the unclean and degraded.

Governing Classes and Urban Elite. Situated below the emperor were two classes or orders (*ordines*) of aristocrats who comprised the nobility of Rome—the senators and, below them, the equestrians. The rationale for drawing a thin line between the emperor and the rest of the model is that the senators numbered only about two one-thousandths of one percent of the very roughly fifty million inhabitants of the empire. The equestrians numbered less than one-tenth of one percent.³⁶ To be a senator, one needed property, the principal source of wealth, of which the minimum value was 250,000 times a day’s wage, a denarius; equestrians needed somewhat half of that amount.³⁷

As Rome expanded, so did the desire of these two *ordines* for accumulating wealth. They sent persons from their orders to make sure the peace was kept and taxes collected. Generally, persons sent out from the senators held offices as legates and proconsuls in the larger provinces, while equestrians went to the smaller provinces and were made prefects and procurators.³⁸ For example, the legate of Syria, Quirinius in Luke 2:2 (C.E. 6–9), and the governors of the small province of Judea conformed to this hierarchy: the first came from the senatorial order, the second from the equestrian.³⁹ And the senate, after Octavian consented, appointed Herod as a client king.⁴⁰

³⁵ Lenski, *Power*, 281.

³⁶ MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations*, 88–89. The estimate of fifty million is his.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 89.

³⁸ A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (New York: Clarendon, 1963) 5. B. Levick, *Roman Colonies in Southern Asia Minor* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967) 103–20, has a thorough discussion of the senators and equestrians and their rank and behavior in southern Asia Minor.

³⁹ E. M. Smallwood, *The Jews under Roman Rule* (Leiden: Brill, 1981) 144–45.

⁴⁰ E. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*

Conquering the Greek East, the Romans permitted the existence of two governmental bodies, the local council, called the βουλή, *boulē*, numbering several hundred⁴¹ and consisting of βουλευταί, *bouleutai*, or *decuriones* (decurions), who were wealthy landowners, and the popular assembly, called the ἐκκλησία, *ekklēsia*, consisting of the δῆμος, *dēmos*, who were formally enrolled adult male free citizens. Theoretically, the assembly, often itself called the δῆμος, should have held the ultimate power because the Hellenistic polis was specially regarded for its democratic form of government.⁴² Because of the presence of commoners in the assembly, it appears that the governing class slides down or coalesces with the widest portion in the graph. (Or perhaps a few commoners slide upwards.) This shows why it is necessary to understand stratification as an overlapping continuum and not as layers in the geological sense. Under Roman rule, however, the βουλή embodied the legislative and executive power because Rome was suspicious of ordinary citizens running affairs. It simply would not do that a “dangerously irresponsible”⁴³ and “bizarre amalgam of very diverse elements”⁴⁴ should hold such powers. So Rome transferred the government over to the propertied class, which would stand to lose more if political unrest or upheaval erupted.⁴⁵ It is almost as if the assembly were allowed to exist in order to placate the masses and to perpetuate the half-truth or even the illusion that they had a decisive voice in important political decisions and that they carried substantive political clout.⁴⁶ The

(175 B.C.–A.D. 135) (3 vols.; rev. and enl. G. Vermes, F. Millar, and M. Black; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1979) 1.281.

⁴¹ A. H. M. Jones, *Roman Economy: Studies in Ancient Economic and Administrative History* (ed. P. A. Brunt; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974) 12. Broughton, “Roman Asia Minor,” 814, offers the following list of the sizes of councils: Prusa, Bithynia—100; Oenoanda, Lycia—500; Halicarnassus—100; Thyatira, Lydia—500–650; Ephesus—450.

⁴² Magie, *Roman Rule*, 1.57.

⁴³ Jones, *The Greek City*, 164.

⁴⁴ V. Chapot, *Province romaine d’Asie* (Paris: 1904; reprint, Rome: “L’Erma” di Bretschneider, 1967) 206, my translation.

⁴⁵ Ste. Croix, *Class Struggle*, 532–33; Jones, *The Greek City*, 164; Magie, *Roman Rule*, 1.57–58; Levick, *Roman Colonies*, 78–79; Chapot, *Province romaine*, 94–216; and I. Lévy, “Études sur la vie municipales de l’Asie Mineure sous les Antonins,” *REG* 8 (1895) 205–31. Lévy’s time period is late, but she traces the shift of power from the assembly to the council to long before the Antonines. Josephus, *J.W.* 1.167–71, LCL 2.79, and *Ant.* 14.89–93, LCL 7.495, records that Gabinius, governor of Syria (57–55 B.C.E.), divided Palestine into five unions and reconstituted the civil administration under an aristocracy.

⁴⁶ See Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 34, LCL 3.337ff.; *Or.* 48, LCL 4.275ff.

“chief political function [of the δῆμος] appears from the inscriptions to have consisted in acclaiming its benefactors in the theatre.”⁴⁷

Since the senate in Rome and the councils in cities throughout the empire seated only a few hundred men, other elites did not necessarily occupy political positions, though many may have served as decurions for a season. Their principal source of wealth was land, the major area of production in the Roman Empire.⁴⁸ And because land was their source of wealth, they can also be known by another designation, “landowners.”⁴⁹ In the thinnest and upper section of the graph, they occupy the middle strip proceeding upward out of the peasants, with the merchants and traders on one side and the retainers and religionists on the other. Many landowners, however, were not part of the aristocracy; their land varied in size, so they can be found up and down this middle strip. Some lived in small villages and were rustics but still wealthy. In order for landowners to live comfortably in the city, they had to own at least one estate of medium size (50–315 acres).⁵⁰ In any case, this class of landowners has been included in the present study because often ancient literature cites cases of the wealthy who were landowners yet whose political involvement is not explicitly stated or made clear. But as noted, it is likely that those in the upper echelon of landholdings occupied political offices at times or at least influenced politics whenever this was to their advantage.

The monetary qualification for a councilship varied in some regions. In Pliny’s hometown of Comum it was 25,000 denarii,⁵¹ but in municipalities of Africa 5,000 denarii sufficed.⁵² Some owned

⁴⁷Levick, *Roman Colonies* 78–79.

⁴⁸Ste. Croix, *Class Struggle*, 120–33.

⁴⁹Ibid., 114–20. For a discussion, see ch. 3, “Landowners,” pp. 168–73.

⁵⁰Fiensy, *Social*, 23–24, calculates three estate sizes that apply not only to Palestine but also throughout the empire, since farming technology and the proceeds from the crops did not vary by much:

- (1) small holdings (10–80 *iugera* [6–50 acres])
- (2) medium-sized estates (80–500 *iugera* [50–315 acres])
- (3) large estates (over 500 *iugera* [315 acres])

His estimate is based on a comparison with estates around Pompeii. The estates averaged 63 acres, though some landowners probably owned more than one estate.

⁵¹J. Gagé, *Les classes sociales dans l’Empire romain* (2d ed.; Paris: Payot, 1971) 163.

⁵²G. Alföldy, *Römische Sozialgeschichte* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1975) 113, cited in D. C. Verner, *The Household of God: The Social World of the Pastoral Epistles* (Chico, Calif: Scholar’s, 1983) 51.

enough to reach the equestrian order.⁵³ For our purposes the requirement that they had to own property valued minimally at 25,000 denarii is adopted, since Augustus made this amount legal.⁵⁴ In Asia Minor the assembly elected men to the council, but this democratic practice was also stripped of its power because of the property qualification of the candidates; it ended up electing the wealthy landowners.⁵⁵ A requirement placed firmly on the shoulders of a βουλευτής, *bouleutēs*, or decurion, to ensure his election was a hefty contribution to public works.⁵⁶ This requirement bifurcated the economic and social distance between councilmen and assemblymen; but the requirement could be a severe burden, and its only recompense in most cases was that the decurions enjoyed the esteem of being in the “little Senate.”⁵⁷ “They sat in special seats at the games and in the theatre; they dined at public expense; they used public water free of charge . . . ; they wore distinctive dress; high-sounding epithets were applied to the order as a whole.”⁵⁸ Honor and prestige were very important to the aristocrats, and they spent money to prove the point.⁵⁹

The aristocrats’ quest for honor and prestige was not limited to seeking these only from their peers; they desired that the masses as well should ascribe them honor. Aelius Aristides writes,

Those who think that they should be superior [κρείττους, *kreittous*] should calculate that if they willingly destroy their inferiors [ἥττους, *hēttous*], they injure their own source of pride [φιλοτιμία, *philotimia*—for the existence of inferiors is an advantage [κέρδος, *kerdos*] to superiors since they will be able to point out those over whom they are superior.⁶⁰

Besides the class tension exhibited in this passage, the source of pride for the superior (whom Aristides later clarifies as property owners) is the inferior. From an aristocrat’s viewpoint, the logic is impeccable. As dark colors serve as a contrast for bright colors, so the inferior serve as a contrast for the superior.

On the other side, the poor have an able representative to express their views, Lucian the satirist (ca. 120–90 C.E., Syria). Even though Lucian was not poor (nor was he an aristocrat), his satirical

⁵³ Garnsey, *Status*, 240.

⁵⁴ MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations*, 90; Gagé, *Classes*, 163.

⁵⁵ Jones, *Roman Economy*, 12–13; Magie, *Roman Rule*, 1.649.

⁵⁶ Jones, *Roman Economy*, 14.

⁵⁷ Gagé, *Classes*, 40.

⁵⁸ Garnsey, *Status*, 244.

⁵⁹ See Josephus, *Ant.* 16.153, LCL 8.269; MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations*, 57–62, 76–77.

⁶⁰ Aristides, *Or.* 24.34, Behr 2.52.

wit means that he observed social relations and commented on them from a variety of viewpoints. In one of Lucian's dialogues a lowly priest complains to the has-been and ineffective deity, Cronus, about economic injustice. As the situation stands now, says Lucian's fictitious priest, the difference between the poor (οἱ πένητες, *hoi penētes*) and the rich (οἱ πλούσιοι, *hoi plousioi*) is the difference between "an ant and a camel."⁶¹

We should be less distressed about it, you may be sure, if we did not see the rich living in such bliss, who, though they have such gold, such silver in their safes, though they have all that clothing and own slaves and carriage-horses and tenements and farms, each and all in large numbers, not only have never shared them with us but never deign to notice ordinary people [τοὺς πολλούς, *tous pollous*].⁶²

The rich and the poor do not constitute classes as such but are the generic designations for all sorts of persons who either have access to wealth or who do not. Throughout this dialogue Lucian mixes in "ordinary" persons with the poor yet sometimes distinguishes between them. This may not be just comedic imprecision; it shows the overlap between the two. As to the economic injustice, one of Cronus's remedies is that the poor should ignore and despise the rich, look the other way, and stop gaping at them and doing them obeisance as the rich pass by in their carriages, dressed in purple clothing, wearing emerald rings. Adopting this novel behavior, the poor would force the rich to treat them with respect or at least take notice of them, since the source of pride for the rich are the poor.⁶³

An interpreter must always cautiously use comics and satirists in the ancient world because they exaggerate or twist the facts to suit their purposes. (Of course, "objective" historians in antiquity were not above twisting the facts or putting spins on them, either.) But Lucian's description of the economic bifurcation (an ant and a camel) and the subsequent tension between the poor and the rich can be confirmed with other ancient sources. Epictetus (55–135 C.E., Phrygia) says that the distance between the decurions and the people was comparable to that between a general and a rank-and-file soldier, and a magistrate and a private individual.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Lucian, *Sat.* 19, LCL 6.115–17.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 20, trans. Kilburn, LCL 6.117–19.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 29–30, LCL 6.127–29.

⁶⁴ Epictetus, 3.24.99: τίνα με θέλεις εἶναι; ἄρχοντα ἢ ἰδιώτην, βουλευτήν ἢ δημότην, στρατιώτην ἢ στρατηγόν; *tina me theleis einai; archonta ē idiōtēn, bouleutēn ē demōtēn, stratiōtēn ē stratēgon*; cited in Garnsey, *Status*, 244.

There is an inscription of a lavish foundation of 300,000 denarii for children and monetary gifts to various citizens from a woman named Menodora at Sillyum in Pisidia. The donations to the citizens follow a hierarchical order, so they offer a glimpse of how the eastern peoples viewed the ruling elite.

The council [*sic*, γερουσία, *gerousia*]⁶⁵ and the people [δημος] honoured the priestess of all the gods and hierophant for life and one of the ten chief citizens, [δεκάπρωτον, *dekaprōton*] Menodora, daughter of Megacles, *demiourgos* and gymnasiarch for the provision of oil, who gave on behalf of Megacles, her son, 300,000 silver *denarii* for the maintenance of children and further gave both in her own gymnasiarchy and in the office of her son, as *demiourgos*, and in the gymnasiarchy of her daughter, to each councillor 85 *denarii*, to each member of the body of elders⁶⁶ 80 *denarii*, to each member of the assembly 77 *denarii*.⁶⁷

The councilors come first, followed by the elders and assemblymen. Not every city had a council of elders, and it seems to have had more prestige than political clout. But that the elders usually had no real power but only prestige and yet were listed above the assemblymen may reveal just how far below councilors the assembly members were. Indeed, in another version of the inscription both the elders and assemblymen receive 20 *denarii* each.⁶⁸ Conspicuous by their absence are the poor. The children are not destitute. This is confirmed not only in the above description, which does not explicitly state that these are poor children, but also in other inscriptions about donations from the rich. In these inscriptions, not often do the rich establish funds for poor children.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ In another inscription the Greek reads, βουλή. See P. Paris, *Quatenus Feminae Res Publicas in Asia Minore, Romanis Imperantibus, Attigerint* (Paris: Ernest Thorin, 1891) 141.

⁶⁶ For a discussion of elders see Jones, *The Greek City*, 225–26; Magie, *Roman Rule*, 1.63.

⁶⁷ Broughton, “Roman Asia Minor,” 784–85. I used the translation of A. R. Hands, *Charities and Social Aid in Greece and Rome* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1968) 192. For further discussion, see Arlandson, “‘Fall and Rise,’ ” 83 n. 52. R. MacMullen, “Woman in Public in the Roman Empire,” *Historia* 29 (1980) 213, says that these proportions match up very well with inscriptions listing donations in the Latin West. It should be pointed out that Menodora gives the wives “of these” three *denarii*, thus conforming to a conservative viewpoint that always exists in any society at any time, as the viewpoint pertains to women. This fact will support our conclusion that women were behind the men in their own class.

⁶⁸ Broughton, “Roman Asia Minor,” 785.

⁶⁹ Ste. Croix, *Class Struggle*, 196–97, correctly notes that the children are not destitute. Hands, *Charities*, *passim*, translates the other inscriptions.

Menodora has so much wealth and power that she can offer landowning councilors monetary gifts. This reveals that it was possible for wealthy women to have power and prestige even if they were not officially admitted into the ranks of the bodies politic, the council and the assembly. Menodora is evidently making this decision on her own. Her father is mentioned only to heighten her prestige. Also, she may be donating the money on behalf of her son and daughter, but her son should not be seen as a κύριος, *kyrios*, or male guardian. She holds very powerful offices: she was honored with a lifetime priesthood and is δημιουργός, *dēmiourgos*, and gymnasiarch (which are discussed momentarily). She is called “one of the ten chief citizens.” It is possible that the word δεκάπρωτον should be translated “(a member of the) Finance Committee” because Menodora held the office of this same title and all of them were males.

As stated, so far no evidence has turned up that women participated directly in the council,⁷⁰ though it did in fact acclaim certain women, such as Plancia Magna of Perga, as benefactresses of the city (see below for Plancia Magna). And it is not clear whether women regularly attended the assembly. In the novel *Chaereas and Callirhoe*, Chariton (1st c. C.E., Caria) says that when it was discovered that Callirhoe’s body was missing (she was actually alive and kidnapped by pirates), her father, Hermocrates, the “first man” of the city, called an assembly, which women attended, to investigate the matter.⁷¹ And when Chaereas and Callirhoe returned home triumphantly, the crowd wanted to hear their story. With one voice the people demanded that the couple be ushered into the assembly, whose setting would facilitate hearing their story a little better. Chariton specifies that both men and women attended.⁷² When Chaereas went in alone, all the women—who are mentioned first—and men shouted to invite Callirhoe into the meeting. This indicates that women played an active, not silent, role. Though Chariton is writing fiction, the context of the two passages does not seem so outlandish that women’s participation in the assembly could not have even remotely taken place, because in terms of social

⁷⁰Magie, *Roman Rule*, 1.649.

⁷¹Chariton, 3.4, *CAGN*, 41–42. The Greek reads, ἐκείνην τὴν ἐκκλησίαν ἂν ἤγαγον καὶ γυναῖκες, *eikeinēn tēn ekklēsiān an ēgagon kai gynaiques* (“that assembly even women attended,” or “that assembly women also attended”). The placement of καί, *kai*, and the use of ἐκείνην, *ekeinēn*, denote that this occasion was an exception.

⁷²*Ibid.*, 8.7, *CAGN*, 121–22. The Greek reads, λόγου δὲ θάπτον ἐπληρώθη τὸ θέατρον ἀνδρῶν τε καὶ γυναικῶν, *logou de thatton eplērōthē to theatron andrōn te kai gynaikōn* (“more quickly than a word [can tell], the theater was filled with men and women”). Unlike the first example, the grammar does not suggest that this was an exception.

data Chariton strives to maintain verisimilitude (the supernatural elements are another matter). Until more evidence turns up or is discovered, however, it must be conceded that these two examples are probably exceptions because of the unusual circumstances surrounding the couple and because the assembly did not intend to vote on legislation.

One of the main functions of the council was the electing and appointing of magistrates, committees, and boards, all taken, not surprisingly, from the same economic class as the decurions. The number of the titles burgeoned, such as ἄρχοντες, *archontes* (magistrates), *duoviri* (two chief magistrates), στρατηγοί, *stratēgoi* (see below), πρυτάνεις, *prytaneis* (see below), βουλάρχοι, *boularchoi* (presiding officers of the council), ἀγορονόμοι, *agoronomoi* (controllers of the market), ἀστυνόμοι, *astynomoi* (city managers), gymnasiarchs, chief priests, etc. The requirement for these offices was that the holders carry out their duties not only without recompense (in most cases) but also at their own expense through acts of generosity. These munificent acts—very public—were called “liturgies,” meaning “services to the city.”⁷³ A gymnasiarch, for example, who had oversight of the cultural and educational center of the polis, might have to pay for the maintenance of the building or for the supply of oil, a sizable expense, used as a cleanser and lubricant for those who exercised in the facilities.⁷⁴ The upkeep of the building itself meant a heavy cost, since in some cities it housed, besides exercise rooms, hot and cold public baths, a lecture hall, a library, and rooms for general conversation.

Since the principal qualification for these political officeholders was wealth and the ready desire to spend it, women of means occupied the offices as well.⁷⁵ The following list includes the offices, the number of women who held them, the number of cities where these women held office, and the centuries when they held them, as far as all of these data are known.⁷⁶

hipparch, ἵππαρχος, highest civic office (5 women in Cyzicus, Troas; 1st–3d C.E.)⁷⁷

prytanis, πρύτανις, ruler (28 eponymous women in 8 cities; 1st–3d C.E.)⁷⁸

⁷³ P. Veyne, *Bread and Circuses* (abr. Oswyn Murray; trans. Brian Pearce; London: Penguin, 1990) passim.

⁷⁴ Magie, *Roman Rule*, 1.62.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.649; Jones, *The Greek City*, 175.

⁷⁶ See Magie, *Roman Rule*, passim, for an explanation of the titles. P. Trebilco, *Jewish Communities in Asia Minor* (New York: Cambridge, 1991) 113–26; Paris, *Quatenus*, 68–77; O. Braunstein, *Die politische Wirksamkeit der griechischen Frau* (Leipzig: August Hoffmann, 1911).

⁷⁷ Trebilco, *Communities*, 123.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 120. Eponymous documents and records were dated according to the year or years that the officeholder was in power.

- stephanēphoros*, στεφανηφόρος, wreath bearer, related to a secular magistracy and a priesthood (37 women in 17 cities; 2d B.C.E.–3d C.E.)⁷⁹
- dekaprōtos*, δεκάπρωτος, member of the finance committee (1 woman, Menodora, 3d C.E.)⁸⁰
- demiurge, δημιουργός, artificer (10 women in 6 cities; 2d B.C.E.–3d C.E.)⁸¹
- archon, ἄρχων, civic magistrate, a general title (3 women in 3 cities)⁸²
- agonothete, ἀγωνοθέτης, sponsor of the contests (18 women in 14 cities; 1st–3d C.E.)⁸³
- panēguriarchēs*, πανηγυριάρχης, sponsor of the sacrifices and banquets (1 woman in 1 city)⁸⁴
- gymnasiarch, γυμνασιάρχης or γυμνασίαρχος, ruler of the cultural and educational center (48 women in 23 cities; 1st–3d C.E.)⁸⁵
- timouchos, τιμοῦχος, honor holder, where there was no prytanis (1 woman)⁸⁶
- priestess, ἀρχιέρεια⁸⁷
- strategos, στρατηγός, member of magisterial board (1 woman in Aegiale)⁸⁸
- gerousiarchissa, γερουσιάρχισσα, president of the council of elders (1 woman in Thessalonica; 3d C.E.)⁸⁹
- Lyciarch, Λυκιάρχης, presiding officer over the Federation of Lycia (2 women)⁹⁰

⁷⁹ Magie, *Roman Rule*, 2.836 n. 23, defines the title; Trebilco, *Communities*, 121, provides the other data.

⁸⁰ Trebilco, *Communities*, 116–17.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁸² Paris, *Quatenus*, 75.

⁸³ Magie, *Roman Rule*, 1.653, gives the definition of sponsor of contests; Trebilco, *Communities*, 123, provides the other data. This office was perhaps the most important to the people, for obvious reasons.

⁸⁴ Paris, *Quatenus*, 51, and Magie, *Roman Rule*, 1.653, give the title; Trebilco, *Communities*, provides the other information.

⁸⁵ Trebilco, *Communities*, 118.

⁸⁶ Paris, *Quatenus*, 76.

⁸⁷ R. A. Kearsley, “Asiarchs, *Archiereis*, and the *Archiereiai* of Asia,” *GRBS* 27 (1986) 183–92. Other priestesses are numerous.

⁸⁸ Trebilco, *Communities*, 124. Aegiale was on the island of Amorgos, just off the southwest coast of Asia Minor. Trebilco notes that this board “involved large responsibility and considerable power” (*ibid.*).

⁸⁹ MacMullen, “Woman,” 215 n. 35. Trebilco, *Communities*, 123, notes that in Sebaste, Phrygia, in 99 C.E. three women were admitted into this council of elders.

⁹⁰ Trebilco, *Communities*, 124. A federation of cities consisted of cities in a province joined together to maintain the imperial cult and to discuss “matters of general interest concerning the administration of the province” (*ibid.*).

Pontarch, Ποντάρχης, presiding officer over the Federation of Pontus
(1 woman)⁹¹

Asiarch, Ἀσιάρχης, highest provincial office in Asia Minor
(1 woman)⁹²

It would be misleading to conclude that these inscriptions correspond to the maximum number of women who held office. Rather, these records are those which have survived or have been found so far. It is likely that they represent far more women who held these offices, more so than the surviving records are able to show. Coins with men's names on them, however, far outnumber coins with women's names. The same is true with inscriptions. Thus, it is probable that regardless of the many women who held political office, the number of men was far greater. If women were numerically equal with men, one would expect a more even male:female ratio in the surviving inscriptions and coins.⁹³

D. Magie conjectures that many duties were honorary and that some offices were derived from the women's husbands.⁹⁴ But R. A. Kearsley convincingly demonstrates through a careful analysis of fifteen inscriptions from Ephesus of the title ἀρχιέρεια, *archiereiai* (chief priestesses) that these women often held this office independently of their husbands and not always honorifically.⁹⁵ Eight of the fifteen mention the women's husbands, seven do not. When Kearsley examines the eight more closely, one of them gives the husband's name without a title behind it, but his wife's name has a title. Yet from other inscriptions her husband held the office of Asiarch. If her title were dependent on her husband's, one would expect to see his title in her inscription. Another woman is described twice as ἀρχιέρεια, *archiereia*, of Asia, while her husband bears the title Asiarch with no sign of his repeating his term of office. So for one term at least she bore her title alone.

Transferring Kearsley's analysis to the above list of offices would exceed the necessary limits of our survey, but a cursory glance at some of the inscriptions reveals that often a woman is mentioned without her husband or other males, as seen with

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ MacMullen, "Woman," 213.

⁹⁴ Magie, *Roman Rule*, 1.649.

⁹⁵ Kearsley, "Asiarchs," 183–92. Most of the inscriptions are dated from the first to the second centuries, and some in the third. The argument that follows can be found *ibid.*, 187–88. Trebilco, *Communities*, 113–17, also decisively argues that prominent Gentile women, independently of men and not only honorifically, held various offices beyond just the religious ones.

Menodora.⁹⁶ So if the inscriptions of the chief priestesses resemble the inscriptions of other offices, and they do, then the question of dependence or independence is not a simple one. But the evidence points towards independence more often than scholarship has so far acknowledged.

On whether the offices were honorary, Magie apparently modifies his earlier conjecture because he goes on to say that indeed some of the women's political offices were not honorary and carried within them real power.⁹⁷ This is especially true with such positions as δεκάπρωτος, *dekaprōtos*, and στρατηγός, *stratēgos*, because the officeholders oversaw their city's finances and public policies. But MacMullen's comments on this matter are particularly perceptive and decisive. He says that even men's positions were often honorary.⁹⁸ More important, the emphasis should not be placed on how the men or women might have carried out their duties. It is unimaginable that a wealthy landowner, just appointed gymnasiarch, for example, would have walked to the local market, bought oil for the athletes, and hauled it back to the facilities. He delegated such tasks to assistants. All of these officeholders were content with broadcasting their benefactions on feastdays, sitting aloft in special thrones in the theater during civic festivities, and later on having their names and deeds inscribed in stone in the forum.

Plutarch expresses the views of most aristocrats against doing menial jobs:

But the old man in public life who undertakes subordinate services, such as farming of taxes and the supervision of harbours and of the market place . . . seems to me, my friend, a pitiable and unenviable object, and to some people, perhaps, a burdensome and vulgar one.⁹⁹

The "old man in public life" is a politician or part of the ruling class, and those jobs are beneath his dignity; they could be carried out by retainers hired by the city.

We have another example of how the elite delegated mundane tasks to their retainers. Dionysius, a major character in *Chaereas and Callirhoe*, the "first man" of Miletus, wanted to throw a feast in celebration of his upcoming wedding to Callirhoe.¹⁰⁰ He called his

⁹⁶ Paris, *Quatenus*, passim. Hands, *Charities*, 175–209, conveniently translates many inscriptions describing social aid and donations by the wealthy, many of whom include women.

⁹⁷ Magie, *Roman Rule*, 1.649.

⁹⁸ MacMullen, "Woman," 215.

⁹⁹ Plutarch, *Mor.* 794A, trans. Fowler, LCL 10.133.

¹⁰⁰ Chariton 3.2, *CAGN* 52.

slave Leonas and carefully instructed him to buy herds of cattle and imported grain and wine. Leonas scurried off to fulfill his master's wishes. The circumstance differs a little from that of political offices because Dionysius did not hold one, but this brief vignette illustrates very well how the elite must never transgress the boundary of dignity by doing menial chores.

By analogy, when a woman announced that she wanted to spend her money to build or improve a structure, the council and assembly cheered and gratefully acclaimed her as δημιουργός, while an architect was appointed to carry out her wishes. Plutarch describes the process after the money had been procured.

Cities, as we know, when they give public notice of intent to let contracts for the building of temples or colossal statues, listen to the proposals of artists [τῶν τεχνιτῶν, *tōn technitōn*] competing for the commission and bringing in their estimates and models, and then choose the man who will do the same work with the least expense and better than the others and more quickly.¹⁰¹

Thus the wealthy and prestigious woman who had donated the money in the first place would not be seen on the job site with a papyrus blueprint furled under her arms, ordering workers what to do and where to go. So the question whether an office held by a man or woman was honorary or real is moot because once a woman or man spent her or his money, an act of political power and social prestige, then the title was added on as a token of appreciation.

Our goal is to tell the story of the life of women, so one of these female politicians will serve as a representative from among the governing orders, since her father was governor of Bithynia. Plancia Magna lived in Perga (or Perge), a town in Pamphylia, about ten miles from the southern coast.¹⁰² Like so many prominent women, her existence is known only through inscriptional and numismatic evidence, which almost always contradicts the literary and philosophical writings about women. The latter writings generally portray the ideal woman as being strictly domestic. Plancia did not fit that mold. She moved into traditional male spheres.

She descended from the leading family of the city, the Plancii, who had come as traders from Italy at the end of the Republic and subsequently acquired land. She lived during the late first and early second centuries C.E. and married a prominent peregrine (non-Roman) named Iulius Cornutus Tertullus, who was a wealthy

¹⁰¹ Plutarch, *Mor.* 498E, trans. Helmbold, LCL 6.367.

¹⁰² For a brief list of the inscriptions, see Arlandson, " 'Fall and Rise,' " 85 n. 75.

landowner. Together they owned vast estates, some as far away as eastern and southern Galatia.

Euergetism (lit., “good-deed-ism”), allied with liturgies,¹⁰³ was expected of all wealthy citizens of Asia Minor. It consisted of donating time, energy, and money for the benefit of the city. Accordingly, Plancia Magna donated money for the construction of one of Perga’s more opulent features, its southern main gate, which was two stories high and had elaborately sculpted designs. For this and other acts of largesse, the council, assembly, and elders erected two statues of her, on the bases of which they inscribed that she was the daughter of M. Plancius Varus and “daughter of the city.” She was also identified as δημιουργός, as priestess of Artemis, as the first and only lifetime priestess of the mother of the gods, and as being pious and loving towards her homeland.

In Greek law it was sometimes necessary for a woman making legal decisions, such as donating money or inheriting property, to have a κύριος.¹⁰⁴ But scholars are divided over this subject. Some highlight women’s independence, others see the guardian as necessary, still others consider him more shadow than substance.¹⁰⁵ The latter conclusion is tentatively preferable, with a slight modification. It seems that a guardian was necessary for most women in Asia Minor, but not always for the very wealthy. Plancia Magna and Menodora are two examples among many of such women who did not have one. As noted, other female officeholders did not need their husband’s or another male’s name in the inscriptions describing their benefactions to the city.¹⁰⁶ (Plancia Magna’s and Menodora’s fathers were mentioned only to elevate the women’s prestige through birth.) Still, other women apparently needed one, as in the case of the very wealthy mother-in-law of a certain Amyntas, whose property was confiscated by a Roman merchant (see this chapter, “Landless Peasants,” pp. 56–57). Thus, apparently for the wealthy the κύριος was either not necessary or a token shadow figure in most cases, and for

¹⁰³ See Veyne, *Bread*, 70–156, for a full discussion. Broughton, “Roman Asia Minor,” 746–97, has an extraordinary list of donors and their donations—note the number of pages—many of whom are women.

¹⁰⁴ For excellent discussions of κύριος, see Van Bremen, “Women,” 223–42; D. M. Schaps, *Economic Rights of Women in Ancient Greece* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 1979) 48–60, esp. 48–52; and C. Vatin, *Recherches sur le mariage et la condition de la femme mariée à l’époque hellénistique* (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1970) 241–53.

¹⁰⁵ Van Bremen, “Women,” 230–35, has a careful discussion of the views.

¹⁰⁶ M. T. Boatwright, “Plancia Magna of Perga: Women’s Roles and Status in Roman Asia Minor,” in *Women’s History and Ancient History* (ed. S. B. Pomeroy; Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1991) 254–55.

other women he was almost always needed. In the empire money could buy legal privileges, and women's wealth performed the same function. More money meant more freedom, which resulted in social boundaries becoming a little more porous. Social boundaries usually manifested physical boundaries—women were typified as being domestic—but wealth purchased for them access into the outside world. They crossed over traditional boundaries, often without a male guardian. In contrast, Jewish adult women did not need a male guardian “in legal actions mentioned in the law.”¹⁰⁷ In this regard Jewish women appear to have been freer than Gentile women.

As to the ruling orders in Jerusalem, there is very little scholarly consensus over “who ran what.”¹⁰⁸ According to one view, “the high-priestly aristocracy, supported by distinguished laymen”¹⁰⁹ and through the instrument of the Sanhedrin, a court of seventy-one men, ruled over Jerusalem and Judea. The Sanhedrin was a mixture of Sadducees, Pharisees, and some scribes. And since the Romans saw the Sanhedrin as the supreme tribunal for governmental matters, it carried moral weight throughout the Jewish world.¹¹⁰

According to another view, the hierarchy was as follows: priests (the high priest and chief priests), influential laity, magistrates, Sadducees, Pharisees, and scribes, followed by the institutions of the βουλή/γερουσία, the συνέδριον, *synedrion* (Sanhedrin), and the “common council,” the latter of which was formed after the Jewish revolt in 66 C.E.¹¹¹ The essential point is that the city and surrounding region were controlled by a select, elite group of men, while the συνέδριον was an ad hoc court used only to adjudicate legal difficulties, such as the trial of Jesus. It never had lifetime members, nor was it a permanent institution, and certainly it was not a “representative national body.”¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ Z. Falk, “Private Law,” CRINT, 1.507.

¹⁰⁸ Sanders, *Judaism*, 458.

¹⁰⁹ Schürer, *History*, 2.210–18. Sanders, *Judaism*, 460, depicts scholars on this issue as “allies.”

¹¹⁰ Schürer, *History*, 2.218.

¹¹¹ J. S. McLaren, *Power and Politics in Palestine* (JSOTSup 63; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1991) 188–225, esp. 199–225. Sanders, *Judaism*, 472, aligns himself with McLaren and claims M. Goodman, *The Ruling Class of Judaea* (New York: Cambridge, 1987), is in their group. But Sanders sees minor differences as well and (p. 490) would also counsel that the situation in first-century Palestine varied too often for us to reach firm conclusions. McLaren's thesis in these pages is not clearly written. On pp. 223–25 McLaren seems to indicate that the order is chief priests, influential laity, βουλή/γερουσία, magistrates, and then συνέδριον.

¹¹² McLaren, *Power*, 223.

As with the Gentile world, so the Jewish world knew of wealthy men and women who did not necessarily occupy official positions of power in the bodies politic; they were the urban elite who were landowners. Those who were merchants also may have owned land, a much stabler means of earning capital. These men and women might also be known as lay aristocrats, since they were not priests or other religionists.

The purpose of this glimpse at Jewish political institutions is not to resolve the discrepancy in scholarship but to make two observations. First, however the hierarchy might have existed, it was a plutocracy. The authors of *1 Enoch* (2d c. B.C.E.–1st c. C.E.), in an extraordinarily terse and incisive classification of the elite, denounce the “kings, governors, high officials and landlords” as enemies of God because they oppress children and God’s elect.¹¹³ When the polemics—obligatory in apocalyptic literature—are ignored, the authors’ choice of words reveals that they clearly knew who lived among the upper classes and what their source of wealth was: the land and its monetary and in-kind fruit. In this passage landlords can be translated as “administrators or governors of the land” or, more literally, as “those who hold, possess or seize the land.”¹¹⁴ And many other ancient texts and documents concerning Jewish economic and social history support this passage in *1 Enoch*. Though most political leaders in Palestine derived their wealth from ownership of land, a few were merchants dealing in grain, wine, oil, and wood; others were bankers and tax farmers (retainers).¹¹⁵ This is in sharp contrast to the Roman and Greek elite, who might invest in business and trading or even own a ship or two, but never be a merchant or trader or banker.¹¹⁶ But as in the pagan world, it is likely that a wealthy Jewish merchant or banker owned land and relied heavily on retainers to carry out the day-to-day duties.

The second observation is that women appear to have been officially excluded from these positions of power in the βουλή or συνέδριον and from being priestesses or even judges in the towns. But they enjoyed a large degree of influence, taking another route.

Josephus (37/8–100 C.E.), not known for his philogyny, recounts stories of powerful women in the ruling families of Palestine. But his portrayal of them is ambiguous because the women are always ulti-

¹¹³ *1 Enoch* 62–63, trans. and notes Isaac, *OTP* 1.43–44.

¹¹⁴ *1 Enoch* 62.3 n. b, trans. and notes Isaac, *OTP* 1.43.

¹¹⁵ J. Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (3d ed.; trans. F. H. Cave and C. H. Cave; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969) 95–96. Fiensy, *Social*, 50, questions Jeremias’s assumptions, however. These men probably owned land.

¹¹⁶ Ste. Croix, *Class Struggle*, 41, 125–29.

mately subjected to male rulers within the ruling families (usually not outside the families), or their power and status are dependent on men, or they work behind the scenes prodding the men to get their way. Salome Alexandra (142–69 B.C.E.) of the Hasmonean family will serve as a representative for every other woman in the ruling class in Palestine, since she was the sole ruler for nine years until her death and therefore had the greatest opportunity to exercise absolute power.

On his deathbed Alexander Jannaeus advised his wife Alexandra to yield a certain amount of power to the Pharisees, which she did.¹¹⁷ She was made to promise that while she was on the throne, she would not take any action without their consent.¹¹⁸ “And so, while she had the title of sovereign [ὄνομα τῆς βασιλείας, *onoma tēs basileias*], the Pharisees had the power [τὴν δὲ δύναμιν, *tēn de dynamin*].”¹¹⁹ Nevertheless (μέντοι, *mentoi*), the queen took certain matters into her own hands. She looked after the welfare of the kingdom by recruiting a large force of mercenaries and making her own troops twice as numerous.¹²⁰ Josephus notes that Alexandra was a brilliant administrator in “larger affairs.”¹²¹ She took pity on some men who were being slaughtered by the Pharisees by ordering the men to guard fortresses outside the Pharisees’ reach.¹²² She ordered her son Aristobulus to march out to Damascus against Ptolemy, son of Mennaenus.¹²³ And she bribed the invading Tigranes, king of Armenia, who thereupon withdrew his army.¹²⁴ Though the bribes placated him, he also withdrew when he heard that Lucullus (a Roman consul in 74 B.C.E.) was ravaging Armenia and besieging the capital of Armenia. Josephus summarizes her life in equally split terms. “She was a woman who showed none of the weakness of her sex; for being one of those inordinately desirous of the power to rule, she showed by her deeds the ability to carry out her plans.”¹²⁵ Yet she had no consideration for decency or justice. She created domestic strife,

¹¹⁷ Josephus, *Ant.* 13.398–432, LCL 7.429–47. In Josephus, *J.W.* 1.110–12, LCL 2.53–55, the Pharisees are said to have taken over the administration slowly.

¹¹⁸ Josephus, *Ant.* 13.403, LCL 7.429–31.

¹¹⁹ Josephus, *Ant.* 13.409, trans. Marcus, LCL 7.433. Josephus, *J.W.* 1.112, LCL 2.55, says, “But if she ruled the nation, the Pharisees ruled her” (trans. St. J. Thackeray).

¹²⁰ Josephus, *Ant.* 13.409, LCL 7.437–39.

¹²¹ Josephus, *J.W.* 1.112, LCL 2.55.

¹²² Josephus, *Ant.* 13.410–18, LCL 7.433–39.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 13.418, LCL 7.437–39.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.419–21, LCL 7.439.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.430, trans. Marcus, LCL 7.445. Josephus, *J.W.* 1.108, LCL 2.53, says, “For this frail woman firmly held the reins of government, thanks to her reputation for piety” (trans. St. J. Thackeray).

disturbances, and misfortune that “arose from the public measures taken in her lifetime.”¹²⁶ “Nevertheless, in spite of reigning in this manner, she kept the nation at peace.”¹²⁷

It is possible that the discrepancy in Josephus’s account of the power struggle between this lone woman and the Pharisees finds its roots in different sources: “a Jewish-Pharisee source in defense of Salome or a Greek source hostile to the Jews (or a Jewish source aimed against the Pharisees).”¹²⁸ This theory may be true in this particular case, but it fails to explain the subordination of all the other women in the ruling families to men in those same families, according to Josephus. Is this subordination based only on his personal ideology? Or is it based on the ideology of his times? And if either one or a mixture of both is the basis, then does this ideology reflect historical reality? While it is accurate to claim that a wise ruler should consolidate her power by forming alliances, it is possible that Josephus is expressing only his own ideology when he describes the Pharisees as holding most of the *de facto* power.¹²⁹ The question of Josephus’s and his culture’s ideology confronting historical reality is complex and not quickly answered. But if we judge only from the ratio of male to female rulers, more men than women occupied positions of power sanctioned by Rome; this sanctioning by Rome counterbalances the claim that Josephus writes from his own ideology, and indicates that most women were behind the men in the ruling class, since the men resisted any attempt from women to usurp even the smallest degree of their power.

It is not clear whether women were involved in politics in cities and towns outside Jerusalem. In the fictional story of the heroine Judith, which was probably written in a Palestinian setting in the second or first centuries B.C.E., three magistrates (ἄρχοντες) of her hometown, Bethulia, whose precise location in Palestine is unknown, called the elders into an assembly (ἐκκλησία) to which all the young men *and women* ran in order to participate in the proceedings (Jdt 6:16). And when the Assyrians were besieging the town (the literary period of the story), men, women, and children “gathered around Uzziah [a magistrate] and the rulers [ἄρχοντας, *archontas*] of

¹²⁶ Josephus, *Ant.* 13.432, trans. Marcus, LCL 7.445–47.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ J. Klausner, “Queen Salome Alexandra,” in *The World History of the Jewish People*, vol. 6, *The Hellenistic Age* (ed. A. Schalit; 6 vols.; New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers, 1972) 6.243.

¹²⁹ Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 2.199–204, LCL 1.373–75. B. Halpern Amaru “Portraits of Biblical Women in Josephus’ *Antiquities*,” *JJS* 39 (1988) 143–170, notes that biblical women in Josephus are idealized and subservient.

the town and cried out with a loud voice" (7:23). This gathering, in which women participated, the author also calls an assembly. It is difficult to know whether all villages and small towns had the political structure of three magistrates, a council of elders, and an assembly of the populace, but it is clear that in this town women attended the panicked proceedings in the more democratic institution, the assembly.¹³⁰ Since, however, the context of the women's involvement in the assembly is emergency situations (as was seen in Chariton's novel), it is impossible to conclude with a high degree of certainty that their involvement reflects historical reality, even though the author seeks to maintain verisimilitude in at least the social data. Until more information is discovered or turns up, it should be conceded either that conclusions one way or the other cannot be reached or that women's involvement in the assembly was exceptional at best.

But fictional Judith's own story is another matter. Because she was extremely wealthy (cf. 8:7–8), it is easier to believe that she—if she was like some powerful and wealthy women in Asia Minor—carried enough political clout in her small town to summon the magistrates and elders to a meeting in order to rebuke them for their lack of trust in God and to reveal her heroic plans to rescue the town (vv. 9–27). She should be considered part of the lay aristocracy. It is no coincidence that her wealth and respect among all the citizens is mentioned just before her political move to call the meeting (vv. 7–8). Traditions that were ultimately fixed in the Mishnah a few centuries

¹³⁰ See Sanders, *Judaism*, 483–84, and Goodman, *Ruling*, 110–11, for a discussion of the assembly. Goodman correctly notes that Rome stripped the assembly of its power, but Sanders misses this point. Its residual power was, however, weaker than Goodman (and perhaps Sanders) admits, for in the examples from Josephus and others that Goodman cites, the rulers carried out their policies regardless of the assembly's opinion, or the rulers bullied the assembly: (1) In Josephus, *J.W.* 1.457–66, LCL 2.215–17, Herod returns from Rome after Caesar reconciles Herod's sons. Herod convenes an assembly and announces that his sons are the heirs to the throne. With Caesar's name being thrown around, opponents in the assembly would not assert their own opinion; indeed, they did not (cf. 1.466). (2) In Josephus, *J.W.* 1.437, LCL 2.207, Herod fears the popular support of Aristobulus, the last Hasmonean high priest. This is not unusual, for rulers often sought to control the nameless masses, fearing that if trouble erupted, Rome would intervene with penalties in hand. (3) The assembly in 1 Macc 14:25–49 appears to have slightly more power only because the events of this passage occur in 140 B.C.E., before Rome took over. (And even in this passage the power of the assembly is more problematic than Goodman cares to concede.) Thus, *pace* Goodman, it is not the assembly as such that Herod and other leaders feared but the masses and civic unrest. The assembly was much weaker than leaders appointed by Rome.

later give autonomous women such as Judith (whose husband apparently did not have a brother who would have married her in a levirate ceremony) a great deal of authority over their deceased husbands' and their own estates.¹³¹ It may very well be that these later rabbinic rulings shed some light on Judith's situation, though caution must be exercised here because of the redactional and chronological problems that rabbinic literature poses. It is probable, anyway, that she was wealthier than the magistrates and elders (though the text does not say this explicitly) because she resembles a few historical women, such as Menodora in Asia Minor, who had more wealth than did many magistrates and members of the council. As noted, the juxtaposition of her wealth to her political power is calculated to lend credence to the idea that a woman in the highest levels could wield much power, especially in a town of this small a size.

Regardless of the ambiguity of these women's political power and status both in Josephus and the Book of Judith, a sample of their wealth is revealed in the settlement of Herod the Great's will.

Jamneia, Azotus and Phasaelis were given over to his sister Salome along with five hundred thousand pieces of coined silver. He also provided for all his other relatives and left them wealthy through gifts of money and the assignment of revenues.¹³²

Caesar made her [Salome] a present of the royal palace in Ascalon. Altogether, then, she had a revenue of sixty talents yearly.¹³³

To each of his two unmarried daughters, beside what their father left them, Caesar made an additional gift of two hundred and fifty thousand pieces of coined silver, and gave them in marriage to the sons of Pheroras. He also gave to the children of the king the sum of fifteen hundred talents out of the amount left to him.¹³⁴

As seen with the wealthy women of Asia Minor, women in Palestine with control over this much wealth exercised considerable power certainly in their own right and in their own circles,¹³⁵ and they lived far above ordinary citizens in Palestine.

¹³¹ J. R. Wegner, *Chattel or Person? The Status of Women in the Mishnah* (New York: Oxford, 1988) 10–19, shows convincingly and easily that women were at their freest when they were not tied to men. Wegner discovers that when the rabbis try to protect patrilineage, they invariably treat women as chattel in relation to their husbands. When the husband dies and no levirate marriages are required, the rabbis treat women as persons and give them great power over wealth.

¹³² Josephus, *Ant.* 17.189, trans. Marcus and Wikgren, LCL 8.459.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 17.321, trans. Marcus and Wikgren, LCL 8.521.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.322, trans. Marcus and Wikgren, LCL 8.521.

¹³⁵ G. Macurdy, *Vassal-Queens and Some Contemporary Women in the Roman Empire* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1937) 63–91.

That the ancients in Jewish society made such distinctions between the comfortable lifestyle of wealthy women and the misery of poor men and women is commonplace, but the distinction is illustrated most remarkably in a passage in the Tosephta.

The sages awarded to the daughter of Naqdimon b. Gurion five hundred golden *denars* daily for a cup of spices, and she was only a sister-in-law awaiting levirate marriage. But she cursed [the settlement] and said, “So may you award for your own daughters!” Said R. Leazar b. R. Sadoq, “May I [not] see comfort, if I do not see her picking out pieces of barley from under the hoofs of horses in Akko. Concerning her I pronounced the following Scripture, *If you do not know, O most beautiful of women* (Song 1:8).”¹³⁶

If her attitude did not reflect the real-life attitudes of others in the ancient world who were wealthy, the entire scene could be comical to a modern reader. Naqdimon lived before and during the first Jewish revolt in the first century C.E. and was one of the richest men in Jerusalem. The sum offered this daughter-in-law for a daily cup of spices or perfume is exorbitant by any standards. (Even if the sum could be proven to be misreported—and it cannot—a fraction of it would still make her very rich indeed.) In any case, she curses an award given on a daily basis that a laborer, not to mention a beggar, would never see in his or her lifetime. As the rabbis depart from the presence of this extremely wealthy and spoiled (so they believe) woman, they say, in effect, “If only you knew about the plight of the poor, O most beautiful of women, you would be more than satisfied with the ruling!”

The luxurious living quarters of these women (and men) also speak of their wealth. Mansions from the Herodian period have been excavated.¹³⁷ The mansion known as the Herodian House was 2,000+ sq. ft. Its rooms were arranged around a central courtyard that had a large reservoir partly vaulted over, a small cistern, and four ovens sunk in the floor. The western wall had three niches, used for storing household cookery. There was a fine set of red sigillata ware, beautifully designed, and a large group of amphorae bearing Latin inscriptions, indicating that the occupants drank wine imported from Italy. In other houses, wall paintings were discovered with warm colors, such as red, yellow, and brown, and also green, black, and other colors, commonly depicting floral

¹³⁶ *t. Ketub.* 5.9–10, Neusner 3.76. Following Peter Pettit, a friend and colleague, I adapted the translation only slightly.

¹³⁷ N. Avigad, “How the Wealthy Lived in Herodian Jerusalem,” *BAR* 1, 23–35.

motifs. Wood furniture did not survive, but a luxurious stone table did. There were coins of varying value and from various regions, and a menorah incised on a fragment of plaster. Besides their architectural and movable features, these mansions were situated in the Upper City of Jerusalem, whose location on a twin-peaked, high, broad hill served as a visual reminder of the social separation between the rich and the commoners. Not surprisingly, it was this area which the rebels and *sicarii* eventually overran at the beginning of the revolt in 66 C.E. and where they burned the archive building, which housed the records of debts.¹³⁸

To sum up, the assessment of wealthy Jewish women's position in society is far from clear: (1) Appearing before a panel of judges, they did not need a male guardian. But other than in the context of legal actions, one could question how this freedom helped their daily lives. (2) The evidence that even ordinary women regularly participated in a small town's assembly is far from conclusive. More evidence is needed. (3) As stated, women were blocked from most official positions of power. But women of extreme wealth and power, such as the historical Alexandra Salome and the fictional lay aristocrat Judith, enjoyed a corresponding degree of freedom. Evidence in Josephus and elsewhere shows that even though wealthy women could control politics from behind the scenes or outside official leadership roles, they did not hold the ultimate reins of power. It only partially answers the question to assert that Jewish texts written by men squeeze women into molds and patterns that conform to domesticity and subservience to men. In real life, women were a step behind the men in the governing orders, if only in sheer numbers. That is, even if women were not restricted to the house or reduced to abject social, legal, and economic submission, women were still behind the men because far more men than women occupied positions of power—a patriarchy; therefore, not surprisingly, men crafted many real-life laws to their advantage. And when Rome sanctioned men as the rulers, women could only work behind the scenes with their wealth and power. (4) But despite all of this, in comparison with the masses, these women's wealth, status, and power combined to provide them with good food, luxurious clothing, spacious houses, respect from the poorer classes (at least face-to-face) and the better choices of wealthy young persons for their daughters and sons—which kept the money in the elite families.

At least seven facts emerge from the survey of the wealthy women of Asia Minor: (1) The council and the assembly were ruled

¹³⁸Josephus, *J.W.* 2.425–29, LCL 2.491.

by men only. Until more information turns up, it has to be conceded that women were usually excluded from leadership roles. As with Jewish women, the evidence showing their regular participation in the assembly is far from conclusive. (2) But women of wealth such as Menodora or Plancia Magna could exercise their own form of power with their own money. From the little information that exists, they do not appear to have been stressed or hampered by this exclusion from the two political clubs. (3) Women were political officeholders, and the power resident in these positions was not always dependent on their husbands' status in society. The political offices were not more or less honorary than men's offices because, like men, women with money and a ready desire to spend it purchased their way into these positions and into making decisions on how or where the money would be spent. (4) These positions of power indicate their status. Money raised it to be very high indeed. That these women were acclaimed political officeholders at all is remarkable because many wealthy men never achieved this status. (5) Inscriptions reveal that some women with this much wealth, status, and power were free from the power of the κύριος, though more study is needed on this subject before firm conclusions can be drawn. (6) Women left the domestic sphere and moved into the outside world, earning for themselves more freedom without suffering loss of status. They made financial and political decisions. (7) Yet for all the political offices that women held, for all the wealth they possessed, and despite conclusion 2 above, women, on a percentage basis, were behind men in the control of wealth and power. (This conclusion takes into account the disparity between the references and inscriptions of women rulers and leaders and the actual number of such women.) To be sure, they were making inroads, but fewer women than men occupied political offices. As with Jewish women, fewer Asian women than men were proconsuls, procurators, prefects, or other leaders. Men, dominating the councils and assemblies, acclaimed women as officeholders, not the reverse. Fewer women than men had enough control of money to do acts of euergetism. In short, men still controlled society politically and economically despite the remarkable gains that women achieved in the prosperous Greek East.

Retainers and Religionists. It was a physical impossibility for the rulers to govern by themselves, so they employed the services of retainers, who were primarily urban. They were the power brokers between the rulers and the ruled and filled positions as clerks, subclerks, financial bureaucrats, tax farmers, rent collectors, judges, Roman lictors (similar to bodyguards and all-around assistants),

personal estate managers, jailers, eirenarchs (chief peace officers), *sitōnēs* (commissioners for grain purchases), chiliarchs (commanders of a thousand soldiers), centurions (commanders of a hundred), doctors,¹³⁹ and scholars. Scholars, especially those of advanced studies, “regularly received freedom from municipal burdens and in some cases at least a salary from the city.”¹⁴⁰ Teachers of less advanced studies had mixed status. Besides scholars for the city, those who attached themselves to wealthy families received a good salary, lived quite comfortably, and sometimes made enough money to enter politics.

The religionists were priests and priestesses. For Palestine this list of religionists may be added: the synagogue leaders, the Pharisees, the rabbis, many of the scribes, the priests, and the Levites. The religionists served as power brokers between God (or the gods) and humanity, but some were also retainers for the state.¹⁴¹ That is, they interpreted God’s (or the gods’) will here on earth in order to decide spiritual or practical questions on how to live properly before the Deity (or deities).

In the model (see fig. 1), as the retainers and religionists move up to the governing classes, the line becomes dotted. This indicates that the boundary between the two sections is porous.¹⁴² In some cases one can never be sure where the day-to-day power resides. For example, the γραμματεῖς, *grammateis*, in Asia Minor (the clerks for the council) and in Palestine (the scribes) might sometimes be numbered among the ruling class because of the power they wielded.¹⁴³

Most priests in Asia Minor earned a comfortable living. From the Hellenistic period onwards, some temple priests were selected on the basis of wealth and heredity, but normally the people granted the offices to a citizen through annual elections for great services rendered to the city.¹⁴⁴ These great services also meant wealth. Priests

¹³⁹ Jones, *The Greek City*, 264, says that doctors received salaries from cities and wealthy patients (who surely were political leaders).

¹⁴⁰ Broughton, “Roman Asia Minor,” 853.

¹⁴¹ Sanders, *Judaism*, 182, observes that “priests and Levites were the employees of the nation for the purposes of maintaining the worship of God in the temple, and teaching and judging the people.” The Pharisees, *pace* Saldarini, *Pharisees*, passim, were not retainers, even though a few were part of the government. As a sect, they did not represent the state. Retainers derived their wealth, status, and power as direct hangers-on to the governing elite. Pharisees did not depend on this elite for legitimation. Rather, they considered themselves power brokers between God and the people, thereby making them retainers for God.

¹⁴² Lenski, *Power*, 244, observes that the boundaries are “fuzzy.”

¹⁴³ For Palestine, see Saldarini, *Pharisees*, passim.

¹⁴⁴ Jones, *The Greek City*, 227–28.

were assimilated into the political offices and were selected from that group.¹⁴⁵ In his travels Strabo (64/3 B.C.E.–21 C.E.) observed that in the city of Mylasa (Caria) “the priestly offices are held by the most distinguished [οἱ ἐπιφανέστατοι, *hoi epiphanestatoi*] of the citizens and always for life.”¹⁴⁶ Generally, the priests were immune from liturgies and were paid from the animal sacrifices and from the treasury in some cities. The position was very lucrative.¹⁴⁷ The high priest of Zeus at Venasa (Cappadocia) drew fifteen talents a year from the very productive (εὐκαρπον, *eukarpon*) land farmed by the “temple-slaves.”¹⁴⁸ In Ephesus the council “had reduced Artemis to penury by the enormous salaries they granted her priests.”¹⁴⁹ These high-level priests, then, are another example of the overlap between the religionists and the governing classes.

Many priests in Jerusalem were aristocratic as well because their power was consolidated by family connections and the political process, especially from the Persian period onwards.¹⁵⁰ That is, since the Torah prescribed that the temple and its functions be placed in the hands of the religious leaders whose qualification was based on family origins and since the temple was a collection and distribution center for wealth, the priestly class could control the political decisions and the flow of money. These elites should be considered as part of the governing class and not so much as retainers for God or the state.

The model, however, shows the wealth, power, and perhaps status of the entire group descending to the level of the merchants, artisans, day laborers, and peasants. Some male and female ἱεροδουλοῖ, *hierodouloi* (lit., “temple slaves”) who farmed land belonging to pagan temples might have been priests and priestesses, but they do not appear to have accumulated wealth or to have enjoyed much status with the people, or their status was the same as the people’s.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 227.

¹⁴⁶ Strabo 14.2.23, trans. Jones, LCL 6.293.

¹⁴⁷ Jones, *The Greek City*, 228.

¹⁴⁸ Strabo 12.2.6, LCL 5.359. See Jones, *The Greek City*, 228, for a discussion. For other passages in Strabo about the wealth of priests in Asia Minor, see 12.2.3, LCL 5.351–53; 12.3.31, LCL 5.371–73; 12.3.37, LCL 5.441–43; 12.5.3, LCL 5.471–73.

¹⁴⁹ Jones, *The Greek City*, 228–29.

¹⁵⁰ M. Stern, “Aspects of Jewish Society: The Priesthood and Other Classes,” in *The Jewish People in the First Century* (2 vols.; ed. S. Safrai and M. Stern; CRINT; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976) 2.580–96.

¹⁵¹ Strabo 12.2.3–4, LCL 5.351–53; 12.3.34–35, 37, LCL 5.435–39, 441–43. Broughton, “Roman Asia Minor,” 642–48; Ste. Croix, *Class Struggle*, 153–54; and P. Debord, *Aspects sociaux et économiques de la vie religieuse dans l’Anatolie gréco-romaine* (Etudes Préliminaires aux Religions Orientales dans l’Empire Romain 48; Leiden: Brill, 1982) 83–89, all discuss the ἱεροδουλοῖ

The majority of priests, rabbis, and scribes in Palestine lived in “great poverty,” eking out their livelihood as artisans or peasants or day laborers.¹⁵² As noted, status is notoriously difficult to measure; and though the Jewish priests living in rural areas mostly worked at jobs similar to those of the people, they still kept their status by virtue of their ethnic purity and yearly religious functions.¹⁵³ Were it not for these two examples of Jewish priests and pagan ιεροδουλοι, the portion of the model (fig. 1) representing retainers and religionists would not have extended so far down.

Women could be found among the retainers in Asia Minor. A woman held the office of γραμματεύς, *grammateus*.¹⁵⁴ Antiochis, a female physician living in Tlos, Lycia (Asia Minor), late in the first century C.E., was honored by the council and assembly for her “healing arts.”¹⁵⁵ And in the second century a male doctor from Pergamum (the home of the famous Galen) built a tomb for his wife and fellow doctor, Panthia, with an inscription, part of which reads, “[you] raised high our common fame in healing—though you were a woman you were not behind me in skill.”¹⁵⁶ In ca. 200 C.E. an unnamed freedwoman of Artemis, wife of Meidianus Plotinianus Varus, was a πραγματευτής, *pragmateutēs* (estate manager) for a landowner in Termessus (Pamphylia).¹⁵⁷ *Eirēnē* (Irene), whose specific date in the second or third century is uncertain, was an estate

and conclude that they were nothing more than peasants, though strict chastity was expected of them. This may have raised their status above ordinary peasants.

¹⁵²Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, 108, 112–19. Sanders, *Judaism*, 179, in a rare moment, agrees with him: the priests worked at “fairly low jobs.”

¹⁵³Stern, “Aspects of Jewish Society,” 580–96, portrays the priests as having prestige in the community apparently without regard to their economic station. Sanders, *Judaism*, 176–77, agrees with him.

¹⁵⁴Magie, *Roman Rule*, 2.1518–19 n. 50. The Greek reads, γραμματεύσασ[α], *grammateusas[a]*.

¹⁵⁵H. W. Pleket, ed., *Epigraphica: Texts on the Social History of the Greek World*, vol. 2 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969), 27–28 (no. 12; for other female doctors, see nos. 1, 20, 26, 27). Cf. M. R. Lefkowitz and M. B. Fant, *Women’s life in Greece and Rome* (London: Duckworth, 1982) 161 (no. 170). Many retainers were either slaves or freedpersons. As freedwomen, their status would have been mixed in the eyes of aristocrats (Corley, *Private Women*, 48–52). But we should not be too hasty in assuming that all these retainers were freedwomen when the texts and references do not say this explicitly. None of the inscriptions cited in Pleket shows the doctors as freedwomen, and the same is true for the short inscription that names Antiochis. Per contra, other inscriptions are quick to point this status out evidently in order to segregate the social classes (cf. Lefkowitz and Fant, *ibid.*, 162 [no. 174]).

¹⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 162 (no. 175). Cf. Pleket, *ibid.*, no. 20.

¹⁵⁷Broughton, “Roman Asia Minor,” 675.

manager (οἰκονόμισσα, *oikonomissa*) for two landowners, Longilianus and Severus, whose property was near the tetrapolis on the Cillianian plains (between Pisidia and Lycaonia).¹⁵⁸ As noted with women among the governing classes, it would be wrong to conclude that these few inscriptions and references correspond to the actual or maximum number of female retainers; rather, these few inscriptions and references represent the women whose records have not survived. It is not at all improbable that other intelligent, productive, and capable women would have been appointed retainers of estates and businesses.

Plutarch, who is usually conservative towards women, recommends that women should study the works of Plato and Xenophon, geometry, astronomy, and a wide variety of other subjects.¹⁵⁹ He also knew a certain wealthy woman named Clea who held “a high office among the priestesses at Delphi” and who “kept company with books” (βιβλίους ἐντυχοῦσαν, *bibliois entychousan*).¹⁶⁰ That is, she was a religious scholar. It is likely that Plutarch’s assessment of Clea and other female scholars whom he knew or knew of reflects other such women. In these two passages Plutarch is not depicting the women as retainers, for wealthy priestesses came from the ruling class, yet one may be able to surmise that these female scholars formally passed on their knowledge, as Sappho formally did in her school several centuries earlier. After all, the context in which Clea is mentioned is Plutarch’s introduction to numerous stories of heroic and extraordinary women whom he and his contemporaries regarded as historical. And these stories were “often cited,” that is, circulated throughout the Greek world, a practice that Plutarch heartily recommends and agrees with because of the high and noble values these stories instill within the male and female hearers.¹⁶¹ This wide

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 674. These texts are conveniently collected in Pleket, *ibid.* Pleket has *Eirēnē* living in the second or third century (p. 39). Broughton is not sure of her date.

¹⁵⁹ Plutarch, *Mor.* 145B–D, LCL 2.337–41. The statement that Plutarch is usually conservative towards women needs clarification. Plutarch’s works are vast and, as such, are complex and multifaceted. For example, according to 145B–D, he prefers that women should be educated in the domestic sphere by their husbands. But in frs. 127–33, LCL 15.243–49, he believes that women and daughters should be educated with men and sons; and the contexts of the fragments, though lost, appear to enjoin public education. Generally, however, Plutarch is conservative and even restrictive.

¹⁶⁰ The first quotation comes from Babbitt’s introduction to Plutarch’s essay (LCL 3.473) and the second from the essay itself: *Mor.* 243D, trans. Babbitt, LCL 3.479. It should be pointed out that βιβλίους ἐντυχοῦσαν can mean simply “read books.”

¹⁶¹ Ibid. 243D, LCL 3.479.

circulation indicates that ordinary women taught them informally. Dio Chrysostom heard a tale about Heracles from an anonymous old woman from the Peloponnese, a tale that he was about to adapt for the purposes of his speech.¹⁶² The wide circulation also suggests that wealthy priestesses (or other wealthy women, for that matter) such as Clea taught them formally. Indeed, until any evidence turns up that wealthy priestesses could not be scholars and formally pass on their knowledge, Clea can serve as an example that such priestesses had it in their grasp to do this if they so desired.

For Jewish society (and Jewish communities in Asia Minor are included) women were mostly excluded from being retainers or religious leaders. Nevertheless, according to some inscriptions, women were synagogue leaders, among other roles.¹⁶³ Other inscriptions reveal that women, though not holding religious positions, donated their resources for the construction and upkeep of synagogues.¹⁶⁴ But the problem with the inscriptions is their late date (mostly from the third to sixth centuries). While this evidence poses no problem for a history of Judaism, much of it cannot apply to this study. It does not represent a trend beginning as far back as the Hellenistic period. But it does follow the increase in Gentile women holding public offices from the first to the third centuries C.E. With this caveat offered, however, there is one inscription from Smyrna, dated to sometime in the second century of our era.

Rufina, a Jewess, head of the synagogue [ἀρχισυνάγωγος, *archisynagōgos*], built this tomb for her freed slaves and the slaves [θρέμασιν, *thremasin*] raised in her house. . . .¹⁶⁵

As seen with Gentile officeholders, Rufina did not hold the office of synagogue leader only honorifically, nor did she depend on her husband. In this inscription Rufina's husband is not mentioned in a legal matter about burial.¹⁶⁶ That she had managerial skills and financial acumen is revealed by her decision to acquire a tomb and her control over numerous slaves. Rufina was obviously a wealthy woman who had money to spare if she could build a tomb for her slaves. But her kindness did not stop at slaves. "The slaves raised in her house" indicates that she took in infants exposed by their parents because, in the context of the other slaves, it is likely that the θρέματα, *thrematta*,

¹⁶² Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 1.49, LCL 1.27.

¹⁶³ B. J. Brooten, *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue* (BJS 36; Chico, Calif: Scholar's, 1982) passim.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 157–65.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 5, trans. Brooten.

¹⁶⁶ Trebilco, *Communities*, 105.

were adopted free children.¹⁶⁷ But whether finding them exposed, raising them slave or free, or adopting orphans, Rufina provides a glimpse into the kindness of an aristocrat of the Roman era. Most did not share her purely humanitarian aid for the destitute.¹⁶⁸

Talmudic literature knows of a female sage, Beruriah, living in the first to second centuries of our era, who garnered enormous respect from male sages.¹⁶⁹ Wife of the sage R. Meir and daughter of R. Hananyah ben Teradyon, she was a brilliant scholar, whose opinions are cited throughout the Talmud. This example shows that women could be engaged in Torah studies directly; they were not entirely passive in such matters. Unfortunately, the story of Beruriah and others like her, while inspiring, can only entice us to wonder how many more such women there were. It is true that ancient literature composed and maintained by men always tends to downplay women's roles, if not suppress out of hand any knowledge of these women's existence; but it is equally true that even after we take this literary suppression into account, male sages would probably still outnumber the women by far. Men dominated in this elite group of scholar-religionists.

As to secular female retainers, in the Book of Judith, Judith's unnamed servant woman (ἡ ἄβρα, *hē habra*; lit., "the graceful one") is depicted as the one "who was in charge of [τὴν ἐφεστῶσαν, *tēn ephestōsan*] all she [Judith] possessed" (8:10; cf. Gen. 15:2; 24:2; 39:4). In the name of her wealthy, powerful, and prestigious mistress, she walked alone in public and approached magistrates and elders—male political leaders—to demand that a conference be convened in order to discuss the crisis of the Assyrian invasion. She was a slave, and this reinforces the notion that slaves had mixed power and wealth and could be found up and down the model (fig. 1). One should not lightly dismiss Judith's servant as a literary character playing a powerful role in a topsy-turvy literary social world in which women were unrealistically prominent (like Aristophanes' play *Lysistrata*, of a few centuries earlier in confined Athens). When a comparison is made between this female Jewish retainer and female Asian retainers, the function of this Jewish servant becomes entirely plausible; in her case the literary world reflects the real world. As

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 10.

¹⁶⁸ Hands, *Charities*, 175–209; for further discussion, see Arlandson "Fall and Rise," 90 n. 117.

¹⁶⁹ M. Kaufman, *The Woman in Jewish Law and Tradition* (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 1993) 69. The summary in the text is based on his brief discussion, expurgated of the harsh polemics against Christianity. Ilan, *Jewish Women*, 197–200, argues that Beruriah existed as described by tannaitic scholars, but not by the amoraim.

noted with Asian retainers, it is highly probable that other intelligent and capable Jewish women working on the estates of the wealthy were appointed to manage the wealthy's affairs or a portion of their affairs.

Women in Jewish society begin the summary, since the results are straightforward. They were not priestesses, and data revealing that they were sages and other religious leaders are scarce. Despite Rufina, Beruriah, and Judith's servant, far fewer women than men occupied positions as retainers and religionists. Until more information turns up, it has to be conceded that women were behind the men in the roles of sages, religious leaders, and retainers, if only numerically.

Ample evidence suggests that women could also be counted among religious leaders in Asia Minor, as seen with Clea and the ἀρχιέρεια. As with priests, priestesses were drawn from the very wealthy. Any woman wishing to advance in her religion had to be rich.¹⁷⁰

To sum up the evidence in Asia Minor, women could be counted among religious leaders, as seen with Clea and the *archieieiai*. As with priests, priestesses were drawn from the very wealthy; any woman wishing to advance in her religion had to be rich. This means that only these women could ever hope to hold positions of leadership. At this economic level women enjoyed a high degree of equality with men. But the female *hierodouloi* were no more than peasants, so their status was open to question since frequently money and status were so tightly connected. It is not clear whether the people held them in higher esteem than they themselves. Women were retainers, but as with our conclusions of the governing orders, fewer women than men served in these positions. This conclusion, as well as the one for Jewish women, takes into account the numerical disparity between actual female retainers and the few surviving literary references and inscriptions which record their existence. Men filled in this class, and women were behind the men on a percentage basis.

Rural People. The urban aristocracies did not condescend to work the land. They hired estate managers to run their affairs, but not even the retainers actually farmed the land. They used farmers or peasants. D. Oakman makes the insightful distinction between two perspectives on the land, one from above, the other from below.¹⁷¹ Viewed

¹⁷⁰ See Kraemer, *Her Share*, passim, for a discussion of wealthy priestesses in a variety of pagan religions.

¹⁷¹ D. E. Oakman, *Jesus and the Economic Questions of His Day* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen, 1986) 37–38.

from above or by the aristocrats, ownership of the land was economic. The more they owned, the more they earned. Viewed by the peasantry or from below, the land was “considered an inalienable heritage.”¹⁷² Any encroachment on the land was seen as an encroachment on the family heritage. The view from above has already been examined, so this descriptive survey now focuses on the view from below. In Palestine and the Greek East generally there were five different classes of peasants: small freeholders (upper and lower levels), tenant farmers, landless peasants, and day laborers.¹⁷³

Small Freeholders. The landed peasants, or small freeholders (4–50 acres), were owners in their own right,¹⁷⁴ but they can be further divided into two groups:¹⁷⁵ the upper-level freeholders owned 15–50 acres and could support their families and live comfortably; the lower-level freeholders owned 4–15 acres and had to supplement their income. Besides supporting the priestly aristocracy through tithes, both levels of freeholders served the governing orders through their taxes, the benefits of which they never saw because the taxes were earmarked for building cities (Caesarea Maritima, Sebaste, etc.) and palaces (Masada and Herodium).¹⁷⁶ “The concept of taxation for the good of the nation as a whole is not an ancient one.”¹⁷⁷

Most lower-level peasants owned, on average, about 6 acres.¹⁷⁸ This would feed a family of six, the average family size, for only one-third of a year, and the family therefore had to supplement its income. And the peasants who owned only 1 or 2 acres¹⁷⁹ were day laborers more than freeholders.

Since so many freeholders owned so few acres, their political power was limited. At first glance their ownership of land may give the appearance of controlling the means of production. To some extent this is true, especially for the upper levels, but ownership did

¹⁷² Ibid., 38.

¹⁷³ Fiensy, *Social*, 77–105. For a definition of “peasants,” see Ste. Croix, *Class Struggle*, 210–11.

¹⁷⁴ Fiensy, *Social*, 92–105. Also see Ste. Croix, *Class Struggle*, 213–15; and P. Garnsey, “Non-slave Labour in the Roman World,” in *Non-slave Labour in the Greco-Roman World* (ed. P. Garnsey; Cambridge: Cambridge Philological Society, 1980) 34–45.

¹⁷⁵ Fiensy, *Social*, 158, 164.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 92. But if the taxes went to the temple, as some of it surely did, then the peasants could benefit from the temple if they lived near Jerusalem or took a pilgrimage during a festival.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 93–95.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 96.

not make the peasants' daily life secure. Although they were not subjugated to potentially oppressive landowners and some in the upper level lived comfortably, it has been observed that "the freer the ancient peasant, in the political sense, the more precarious his position"—a "deep paradox."¹⁸⁰ Their position was insecure because they were totally responsible for the harvest and for protecting their property from the incursions of officials, urban aristocrats, and bandits. One can surmise that, short of uniting together on a common front with a common cause, which happened rarely, they did not have much power, political or otherwise. Their status was low from the viewpoint of outsiders; the city dwellers generally despised the people of the land, and the peasants returned the favor.¹⁸¹

Yet this bleak picture must be counterbalanced. The growing debate in scholarship over the prosperity or poverty of first-century Palestine probably reflects historical reality: many peasants lived ordinary, untroubled lives—insofar as all peasants in all regions can—while many did not.¹⁸² And the debate perhaps reflects class structure among the peasantry. After all, tenant farmers, landless peasants, and day laborers were below upper-level and lower-level freeholders. Scholars who see rural Palestine as oppressed economically are not arguing that small freeholders were losing land by the thousands each month, thereby being turned into tenants and landless peasants; nor are they arguing that peasants of various levels were unproductive (though perhaps some scholars are guilty of hy-

¹⁸⁰ Finley, *Ancient Economy*, 108.

¹⁸¹ See MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations*, 28–32, 52–56, for enlightening discussions on rural-urban hatred. Fiensy, *Social*, 143–45, brings up the subject as well.

¹⁸² For an optimistic view of the social and economic situation in Palestine, see T. E. Schmidt, *Hostility to Wealth in the Synoptic Gospels* (JSNTSup 17; Sheffield: JSOT, 1987) 17–30; and Sanders, *Judaism*, 157–67. In my opinion, Ste. Croix and Fiensy adduce more evidence than do Schmidt and Sanders. Sanders, p. 168–69, backtracks without explanation. Schmidt spends much time refuting F. Grant's outdated book, *The Economic Background of the Gospels* (1926), D. Mealand's *Poverty and Expectation in the Gospels*, G. Theissen's *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity*, and J. Gager's *Kingdom and Community* (Theissen's and Gager's books are widely acknowledged as fledgling attempts), and he does not offer enough of his own positive evidence for prosperity. Given that his book rises or falls on prosperity, he should have found at least as much positive evidence for prosperity as Ste. Croix does for, say, increasing landlessness and debt bondage in the Greek East. Oddly, Schmidt does not include Ste. Croix in his bibliography. My main points, however, in this section are the following: some peasants lived on the edge of poverty and potential ruin, but they still were productive, contributing members of society; and women played a vital role in making sure their families survived.

perbole). But surely some peasants among the lower-level freeholders (and even upper-level freeholders) were losing their land.

Tenant Farmers. Tenant farmers had no or very little land of their own “and thus were compelled to enter into a contract with a landowner to farm his land, paying him a fixed amount of rent,”¹⁸³ in monies or in a percentage of the crops or in labor. Those who paid their rent by crop production usually paid one-third or a half, but the landlord could demand two-thirds, though one-half seems onerous and the demand of two-thirds impossible.¹⁸⁴ Those who paid in monies were subjected to the whims of the seasons and production. If the crops were plenteous, the rent was paid; but if they were poor, the rent was burdensome. Most of the tenants were so far in arrears that they might have been de facto bondsmen.¹⁸⁵ The farmers held their tenancies either for a fixed period of time (usually 4–5 years in the Greco-Roman world)¹⁸⁶ or at the will of the owners—that is, when the owner decided to eject the tenants, his will was law. Neither situation was very secure.

This economic insecurity and dependence on the whims of others could never have engendered power or high status. Like the freeholders, tenants never enjoyed honor from the city dwellers. The relationship between the landlords and peasants was mostly tense or hostile. Mark 12:1–8 pictures a landlord sending his retainers to collect the “fruit of the vineyard” (v. 2), but the farmers beat or killed them.¹⁸⁷ In fairness, however, it should be noted that relations were not always strained. The owners had an economic interest in protecting their land (and, subsequently, those who farmed it) from, for example, “the depredations of Roman officials and soldiers—always a terror to the peasantry in the Roman empire.”¹⁸⁸

Landless Peasants. Landless peasants were increasing in Palestine and the Greek East, though precise numbers are impossible to

¹⁸³ Fiensy, *Social*, 75. Fiensy is basing his analysis squarely on that of Ste. Croix’s in *Class Struggle*, 210–14.

¹⁸⁴ Fiensy, *Social*, 81–82.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 76. Oakman, *Questions*, 72–77, has a good discussion of indebtedness. The picture is very grim for the peasants. Ste. Croix, *Class Struggle*, 136–39, 162–70, 282, analyzes the situation of debt bondsmen throughout the Greek East.

¹⁸⁶ Ste. Croix, *Class Struggle*, 83.

¹⁸⁷ For peasant revolts, see *ibid.*, 215–16; Fiensy, *Social*, 76; and J. D. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991) 451.

¹⁸⁸ Ste. Croix, *Class Struggle*, 215.

obtain.¹⁸⁹ The Synoptic Gospels give evidence of this phenomenon (Mark 12:1–8; Matt 9:37–38; 10:10; 20:1–8; Luke 15:17). Loss of land resulted from expropriation by Rome and its emissaries, from limited resources in the face of hereditary laws (a large family living on a small plot could only provide the inheritance to the oldest son, so the others had to look elsewhere), and from takeovers by the urban aristocracy.¹⁹⁰ The latter were effected by foreclosures on farms when debts could not be repaid,¹⁹¹ or by encroachment, which included moving boundary stones, threatening violence, or taking illegal court action.¹⁹²

Cicero provides a tragic example of this violence in his prosecution in 59 B.C.E. of a Roman named Appuleius Decianus, a merchant, who had acquired land from the “wealthy but unwise” (Cicero’s words) mother-in-law of Amyntas, a native of Apollonis (Mysia).¹⁹³ It seems Decianus attached her to himself with “flattery” (Cicero’s word), while secretly sending one of his retainers to establish her estate as his own. Cicero objected to the legality of Decianus’s actions because the mother-in-law did not have a male guardian, or *tutor*, a requirement according to “Greek law” (Cicero again).¹⁹⁴ Normally, Amyntas would have been the guardian, but Decianus had mistreated him by maiming his limbs with stones, clubs, and fetters, crushing his hands, breaking his fingers, and cutting his tendons, just as a Mafia gangster would do today. So Decianus registered his own

¹⁸⁹Ibid., 162–70. Ste. Croix has a full discussion of debt bondage and its results in the Greek East from the Hellenistic to Roman periods. It is difficult to believe that Palestine would be exempt. Fiensy, *Social*, 77, analyzes Palestine and confirms Ste. Croix’s results.

¹⁹⁰Fiensy, *Social*, 77–78.

¹⁹¹Oakman, *Questions*, 72–77.

¹⁹²Fiensy, *Social*, 79. Broughton, “Roman Asia Minor,” 658–62, lists several illegal actions in Asia Minor. Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 47.21–22, LCL 4.267–69, recounts how he had to sue to get his own estates back after his sister died. It is probable that he lost control of his property when he was exiled by Rome. In any case, two important facts emerge: his sister had absolute control over not only her own property in her own right but also over his; when she died, he had to fight to get control.

When my sister died I not only derived no profit from her estate but even lost everything of mine that she controlled [εἰς εἴχην, *eiche*] and had to make a loan for the purchase of my farm.

¹⁹³T. R. S. Broughton, “Roman Landholding in Asia Minor,” *TAPA* 65 (1934) 211. See Cicero, *Flacc.* 70–74, LCL 519–25.

¹⁹⁴Cicero’s use of the phrase “Greek law” is vague; for further discussion, see Arlandson, “‘Fall and Rise,’” 92 n. 143.

retainer, Polemocrates, as the *tutor*. Decianus also stole Amyntas's wife while she was pregnant. She gave birth to a daughter, and both were still living in Decianus's house when Cicero was prosecuting him. Cicero goes on to recount how Decianus violently and fraudulently confiscated the estates of other "weak-minded" women who did not have a guardian. Because the litigants in the case were wealthy landowners, the lesson can be drawn that if Amyntas had a difficult time recovering his property, then one can well imagine the utter lack of success a peasant farmer living anywhere in the empire had in a legal action against officialdom or friends of officials.

Aelius Aristides recounts a story of his own troubles. While he was away from his estate, his kin had bought him some property at Hadrianotherae (Mysia) in 142 C.E. Shortly afterwards, some neighbors wanted to appropriate it. Aristides describes the events:

Certain Mysians, first saying and next doing many different things, tried to appropriate it. When they despaired . . . they gathered together as many servants and hired men as they could, and attacked, armed with every weapon. Then some of them from a distance tossed and cast stones and clods, and some joined in hand to hand combat, some took possession of the house and treated the contents, as if they belonged to them. Everything was full of confusion and wounds.¹⁹⁵

A court case ensued, and Aristides won the property back because of his friends Julianus, the governor, and Rufinus, who was *consul ordinarius* of Pergamum.

There is also the case in which a woman seized property by force.¹⁹⁶ Babata was a Jewess who came from the village of Maoza on the southern shore of the Dead Sea in Nabatea and lived before and during the Bar Kokhba revolt against Rome (132–35 C.E.) During this revolt she and her entourage fled northward to a cave in the Wadi Nahal Hever in the province of Judea, just south of En-Gedi, on the western shore of the Dead Sea. She brought with her thirty-five legal documents varying in date from 93 to 132 C.E. These documents reveal that she was a wealthy rural landowner who exerted considerable control over her property. (She would occupy the middle strip, that for landowners, in the thinnest section of the model [fig. 1] but probably towards the bottom; she would not have been considered an aristocrat.) Six documents (nos. 20–25) pertain to establishing the

¹⁹⁵ Aristides, *Or.* 50.105–6, Behr 2.339. This account was written in 170/171 C.E. For other accounts of hostile takeovers, see MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations*, 6–14.

¹⁹⁶ N. Lewis, Y. Yadin, and J. Greenfield, eds., *The Documents from the Bar Kokhba Period in the Cave of Letters* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society and Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1989).

ownership of property that had belonged to a Jesus, the brother of her second husband, Judah. After the death of the brothers before 130, Babata took possession of three productive date orchards in lieu of unpaid debts. The guardians of the orphans of Jesus challenged this claim. Papyrus 23 summons Babata to court before Haterius Nepos, *legatus pro praetore* in Petra, “in the matter of a date orchard devolving to said orphans which you hold in your possession by force [βίαι, *bia*]. . . .”¹⁹⁷ It is not likely that Babata hired professional soldiers to fend off any encroachment onto the orchard but instead employed some day laborers, as the case of Aristides shows. The six documents do not reveal the outcome of the court trial, which dragged on for over a year, but “the fact that Babata kept these documents presumably implies that she emerged victorious in this litigation.”¹⁹⁸

As noted, if the wealthy attempted to take over the property of other wealthy landowners, then a fortiori they made the same attempts on the property of peasants of few acres; and perhaps these peasants attacked each other as well. But the frequency of both situations beyond the records that survive is impossible to ascertain. These three episodes notwithstanding, the main cause of landlessness was Rome’s confiscation of property throughout the empire. This practice trickled down to its emissaries, then to the indigenous urban elite (officially permitted, unlike the two stories above) through investments and the entrepreneurial spirit (or, depending on the perspective of the victims, through loans at high interest with property as collateral), and finally to the victim-peasants.¹⁹⁹

M. Goodman provides an analysis of how this shifting of landholdings and weakening in other structures may have affected the family.²⁰⁰ As noted, the extended family broke up because a small plot of land could never sustain new families if it was divided equally through inheritance. This breakup occurred especially if the land was confiscated, even though the new landowners may have asked the disinherited farmers to stay and work. In any case, the inheritance and ownership completely disappeared. So family members, and with them their dependents, had to seek their livelihood

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 103–4.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 102. The editor offers an alternative interpretation: “At the very least, these documents constitute evidence that she complied with the requisite legal formalities” (*ibid.*).

¹⁹⁹ Fiensy, *Social*, 79, and Broughton, “Roman Landholding,” 207–39. We should remember MacMullen’s summary, *Roman Social Relations*, 38, of over five centuries of Roman rule: “fewer have more.”

²⁰⁰ Goodman, *Ruling*, 68–70. Though I borrow from these pages, I will point out some disagreements.

elsewhere, such as in the city. “In place of the extended family the nuclear family became the primary social unit.”²⁰¹

But the nuclear family, too, was coming under attack. Burial customs reveal that while wealthy families could afford a *loculus* or common tomb, the poorer families may have buried their dead in individual graves separated from other family members. But against this picture, says Goodman, must be juxtaposed the idea that in times of stress the nuclear family adhered together. Josephus tells a story about a family of brigands who stuck together even in death.²⁰²

If the family was undergoing a slow disintegration, then the male head was also losing his control by the first century of our era. Some men asserted the importance of the individual over the family, as in the cases of the sectarians at Qumran and En el-Ghuweir. The individual interments in these two communities suggest that males denied their families. And even when men remained close to their relatives, they did not feel compelled to obey their father. The son in one high-priestly family led a faction opposing his father’s in 66 C.E.

Finally, simultaneous with the father’s loss of political power in the family came more freedom for adult females. “Divorce was evidently common—a fact confirmed rather than denied by moves made by some sectarians to ban divorce altogether, an innovation quite contrary to the plain meaning of the Torah.”²⁰³ And in some circles women could initiate divorce, though, Goodman concedes, this was probably not widespread. And a man could not often raise a heavy hand against a wife who infringed on the law or customs when everyone in the family was suffering equally from loss of land and from being forced to move around the country at harvest time and, at harvest’s end, into the city when building programs were under way.²⁰⁴ Thus, patriarchy was losing its grip, particularly over the extended family.

On the surface, some of Goodman’s claims stand on their merits. Loss of land surely must have affected the family, and probably just in the way he described: families not having enough inheritance to provide the heirs with an incentive to stay on the land.²⁰⁵ And the husband probably did lose some authority in the family, though it is

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 69.

²⁰² Josephus, *Ant.* 14.429–30, LCL 7.671–73; J.W. 1.310–15, LCL 2.147–49; both are cited in Goodman, *Ruling*, 69.

²⁰³ Goodman, *Ruling*, 70. Goodman is basing his information about divorce on Salome (Josephus, *Ant.* 15.259–60, LCL 8.123–25) and Herodias (*Ant.* 18.136, LCL 9.93).

²⁰⁴ S. Freyne, *Galilee, Jesus, and the Gospels* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1988) 148–49.

²⁰⁵ Cf. Fiensy, *Social*, 78.

hard to see how one can measure this phenomenon in precise terms. But at bottom, the major difficulty with Goodman's analysis is that he too often takes his evidence from the ruling elite or radical sectarians—neither group very numerous compared with the rest of the population—just when he is analyzing the economic deprivation in *all* levels of society. Consequently, it is not likely that a peasant woman experienced as much economic and social freedom from her husband as Goodman implies, if she ever had this goal in the first place. She did not initiate divorce unless she could go into a better οἶκος, *oikos*, and this was not probable, since she had no attractive dowry. Goodman may tacitly recognize this when the examples of divorce he offers come from the Jewish community in distant Elephantine and from two Herodian princesses. Rather, a woman living at the peasant level shared in the destiny of her husband and family. We should not look for upward social mobility here. If there were mobility, it would have been only one way—down.²⁰⁶ For instance, if women came from poor families that owned 4 or fewer acres and married men with as many acres, then it would have been impossible for the women to escape from these conditions even if they had wanted to escape. They could never have accumulated enough resources.

Day Laborers. Either day laborers never had land to begin with, or they were landless peasants who hired themselves out to work, especially during the harvest.²⁰⁷ In Matt 20:1–16 laborers gathered at a known place in a village, waiting for work. When the landowner found them, he expressed surprise that they had been milling around during the grape harvest. On the same day, he hired many more at various intervals. This story perhaps indicates that unemployment was high even during a productive season. In any case, this passage perfectly reflects the life of the day laborer not only in Palestine but also in the Greek East.²⁰⁸ They stood around in known places in towns and villages, waiting to be hired. Some of the more common jobs were weeding, harvesting, threshing, picking fruit, and ditch digging; transporting reeds, wood, crops, people, and so forth (there is a story of five men hired to carry a polished stone from Galilee to Jerusalem for use in the temple);²⁰⁹ and guarding animals, fields, city gates, children, the sick, and the dead. Other laborers were barbers, bathhouse attendants, cooks, messengers, and manure gatherers.

²⁰⁶ Finley, *Ancient Economy*, 99, says that “for movement one must look to the upper classes.”

²⁰⁷ Fiensy, *Social*, 85–90.

²⁰⁸ Ste. Croix, *Class Struggle*, 186–88.

²⁰⁹ Fiensy, *Social*, 86.

The daily life of the laborer was hard. In the cemetery of the Qumran community are skeletal remains, dated to before 68 C.E., of two males who were twenty-two and sixty-five years old.²¹⁰ The younger manifestly had worked with his hands from an early age and walked barefoot all his life. The older had probably carried burdens on his shoulders because the bone structure was deformed in a shape that indicates burden bearing.

It is not too difficult to assess the political power of day laborers: they had none. Landless peasants and day laborers were at the bottom of the peasantry because they either had already suffered from loss of land or had never had any to begin with. They had no voice in politics and were subject to the whims and incursions of the rich and powerful. But even though these peasants and the expendables overlap in class structure, most peasants should not be categorized as expendables. Most were productive—or tried to be—in society, unlike the expendables, who could not be productive.

To determine the daily subsistence of a laboring peasant without land in rural Palestine, where Jesus ministered, three parts of an equation are needed: the minimum amount of food for physical replenishment, the daily income, and the cost of obtaining the food. Scholars generally agree that the average wage for a laborer was one denarius per day.²¹¹ But it would be misleading to stop at this datum and imply that his daily wage corresponds to modern, Western daily wages. It is better to ask about the buying power of the denarius.

For the minimum amount of food, the results of studies on peasants in underdeveloped countries reveal that a hardworking peasant needs about twenty-five hundred calories per day.²¹² Those of heavier weight would need more, and others, such as children, would need fewer. Nevertheless, twenty-five hundred calories “offer a useful reference point.”²¹³ This amount equals about one liter of grain.²¹⁴ So a peasant had to buy one liter of grain per day in order to replenish himself with enough food to perform his labor.

It is usually figured that a *seʿah* a common unit of measurement in Palestine, cost five-sixths to one denarius.²¹⁵ To be generous with our

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid., 86–87. For further discussion, see Arlandson, “‘Fall and Rise,’ ” 92 n. 150.

²¹² Oakman, *Questions*, 58–61.

²¹³ Ibid., 58.

²¹⁴ Oakman says that twenty-five hundred calories work out to eleven American bushels per year (ibid., 60). Since 1.1 liters equals 11.5 bushels, we round off eleven bushels to one liter.

²¹⁵ D. Sperber, “Cost of Living in Roman Palestine,” *JESHO* 8 (1965) 251. Sperber is referring to *m. B. Mešīʿa* 5.1, Danby 355. Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, 122,

final calculations, we will use the lower amount. How many liters did a *se'ah* contain?²¹⁶ Evidence suggests that, depending on the region, a *se'ah* ranged from 8.64 to 18.6 liters; obviously, the smaller *se'ah* cost less than the larger.²¹⁷ The mean value of thirteen liters is settled on here.²¹⁸ As an independent confirmation that our twenty-five hundred calories or one liter is on target, the Mishnah states that a poor man's daily ration was one-twelfth of a *se'ah*, 1.1 liter.²¹⁹

It would be almost meaningless to say that a single peasant spent one-thirteenth of five-sixths of a denarius to buy one liter of grain. In Palestinian society celibates or confirmed bachelors were very few.²²⁰ Almost all peasants had families. Through talmudic references and excavations of villages (e.g., fifty people and six houses), scholars conclude that the average family had six to nine members.²²¹ Again, to be generous, our peasant is allowed to have a family of only six. He needed to purchase about six liters of grain for his family. And it was already agreed that a *se'ah* contained thirteen liters and cost five-sixths of one denarius. Therefore, a peasant had to spend about 38 percent of his daily wage just to buy his daily bread, not to mention other food items, such as oil or fruit in season; rent and taxes; and longer-term items, such as clothing, sandals, and household utensils, if he did not make them (even then the raw material would not be free).

There is a final important element. Up to now it is assumed that the day laborer or landless peasant had steady employment. This was tragically not the case. His work was seasonal, and because of Sabbaths and festivals, he probably worked only 200 days a year.²²² This amounts to a shortfall of 165 days, or 45 percent of the year, during

holds for one denarius, referring to Josephus, *Ant.* 9.85, LCL 6.47. It is unclear whether this price is limited to Jerusalem. Whatever the case, my calculations are only designed to give a rough estimate of the cost of living for a peasant.

²¹⁶Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, 122. I am assuming, because Jeremias does not say, that the grain is wheat. See Arlandson, " 'Fall and Rise,' " 162 n. 102, for a discussion of the price of wheat in Cicero and of Jeremias's problematic reference to Cicero and other ancient authors.

²¹⁷G. Hamel, *Poverty and Charity in Roman Palestine, First Three Centuries C.E.* (Los Angeles: University of California, 1990) 245.

²¹⁸Ibid., 246; Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, 122. Jeremias appears much more confident than Hamel in asserting that a *se'ah* was thirteen liters and cost one denarius.

²¹⁹Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, 122.

²²⁰G. F. Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of the Tannaim* (3 vols.; Cambridge: Harvard, 1954) 2.119–20. He cites a few exceptions to the rule.

²²¹Fiensy, *Social*, 87.

²²²Ibid., 89.

which he was unemployed and could not earn his one denarius. He was forced, therefore, to stretch the denarius that much further. And if he met up with injury, disease, landowners withholding wages, soldiers on expeditions requiring food, or poor crop yields, then life became even more difficult. Thus, at this level of society the economic contributions of the wife played an especially important role.

The Mishnah lists several typical contributions of a peasant woman: grinding flour, baking bread, washing clothes, cooking food, nursing children, and working in wool—in short, domestic chores.²²³ Statements by Columella (fl. 1st c. C.E.), a Latin author on agricultural affairs who wrote about women's roles in agricultural production, match up with the Mishnah's comments. He maintains that women should and did work primarily in the house.²²⁴

It is possible that the view that women should be confined mostly to the house was held by Columella and other male writers of Greco-Roman agricultural literature because of their superstitious beliefs about women in general, beliefs common even among those of the highest circles.²²⁵ Columella reports the claim of a Greek Egyptian named Bolus of Mendes that a menstruating woman could kill caterpillars by walking around the infested plant three times with loose hair and bare feet.²²⁶ Columella himself believed that a menstruating woman could wither a rue plant just by touching it and could halt the growth of, or even kill, new cucumber and gourd shoots by looking at them.²²⁷ Evidently, the successful farmer should keep women away from agriculture one week of the month.

²²³ *m. Ketub.* 5.5, Danby 252. See S. Safrai, "Home and Family," in *The Jewish People in the First Century* (2 vols.; ed. S. Safrai and M. Stern; CRINT; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976) 2.761; and Sanders, *Judaism*, 122, who regard the passage as genuinely reflecting what women did. It is interesting that the Mishnah suddenly jumps up into higher levels as the passage continues:

If she brought him in one bondwoman she need not grind or bake or wash; if two, she need not cook or give her child suck; if three, she need not make ready his bed or work in wool; if four, she may sit [all the day] in a chair. (Danby, 252)

Some of the women mentioned in this excerpt may have been upper-level freeholders or even wealthy urbanites.

²²⁴ Columella, *De re rustica* 12.praef.1–7, LCL 3.175–77. Following Ste. Croix, *Class Struggle*, 234–36, I do not hesitate to use Columella even though he lived in the West: he freely borrowed from Greek manuals on agriculture and says as much (*De re rustica* 7.5.15, LCL 2.271; and 12.praef.7, LCL 3.177–79).

²²⁵ Ste. Croix, *Class Struggle*, 234–36.

²²⁶ Columella, *De re rustica* 11.4.64, LCL 3.169.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.3.38, 50.

Yet, alongside these descriptions of women working in the house, two more passages are juxtaposed. The Mishnah reads,

The School of Hillel say: We have heard no such tradition save of a woman that returned from the harvest. . . . The School of Shammai answered: It is all one whether she returned from the harvest or from the olive-picking or from the vintage. . . .²²⁸

And Columella reads,

But in order that she may have recourse to wool-work on rainy days or when, owing to cold or frost, a woman cannot be busy with field-work under the open sky, there should be wool prepared and combed out already.²²⁹

Also, Plutarch in a passing comment notes that women worked as “gleaners.”²³⁰ It is clear from these passages that it is assumed, not questioned, that women left the domestic sphere to work in the fields. These writers are expressing crucial data in an offhanded manner, thereby increasing the chances of the reliability of the data. If the superstitions of intellectual Greek and Roman authors are left aside and if attention is paid to Columella’s assertion that women worked inside but also outside the house, and to Plutarch’s tidbit that women were gleaners, and if these are added to the Mishnah’s view that Jewish women worked inside but also outside the house, then the three sources are indeed reflecting what happened in an agrarian society. It was typical for peasant women to feed, clothe, and care for their families from the domestic sphere; but they left these chores behind to work in the fields, especially during the harvest, in order to add more income to their families. The need to survive tends to break down customs that might hinder staying alive. Thus, as the wealth of women in the governing classes broke down some boundaries, so did the hardships of peasants.

In the Greco-Roman world two stories about female day laborers indicate that the privilege of childbirth was difficult for peasants. Strabo relates a story told to him by his friend Poseidonius in Liguria (on the southern coast of France, according to his geography).²³¹ Both men claim that Poseidonius’ story illustrates the strength of other women in other regions, such as Thrace (northeast Greece, above northwest Asia Minor) and Scythia (north of Armenia, along the Caspian Sea). That is, they are implying that the following pathetic scene could have happened in other parts of the empire.

²²⁸ *m. Yebam.* 15.2, Danby 241; *par. m. Ed.* 1.12, Danby 423.

²²⁹ Columella, *De re rustica* 12.3.6, trans. Forster and Heffner, LCL 3.191.

²³⁰ Plutarch, *Mor.* 784A, trans. Fowler, LCL 10.81.

²³¹ Strabo, 3.4.17–18, LCL 2.113.

First, a certain Charmoleon from Massilia hired some male and female ditch-diggers. One of the women was pregnant. When she was seized with the pangs of childbirth, she went away from her work, delivered the baby, and came right back to the job in order not to lose her pay. Charmoleon observed her doing her work painfully but did not find out the cause until later that day. Upon learning it, he sent her away with her wages. She took the baby to a spring, washed and swaddled it, then took it home. The fact that she was willing to suffer for a day's wage reveals how destitute she and her family were.

Second, in the later years of his life Varro (116–17 B.C.E.) recounted a story of pregnant women from Illyricum (northwest of Greece, on the Adriatic Sea) who “often” stepped aside from their work when their time had come, delivered their babies, brought them back, and continued working.²³² One woman in particular brought hers back “so soon that you would say she had not borne it but had found it.”²³³

These two anecdotes can be supported with a last one from modern-day Turkey (ancient Asia Minor). Pregnant peasants have been observed squatting in the fields, giving birth and resuming their work with remarkable strength and endurance. Only women having complications were sent with difficulty to the hospital.²³⁴

To sum up, six observations can be made: (1) Peasant women lived a precarious life politically and economically. Except for the upper-level freeholders and perhaps some lower-level freeholders, they lived at about poverty level and had no means to protect themselves. Their life was not one of ease and comfort. (2) Consequently, the extended family began to fracture. From this fact it may be conjectured that the nuclear family began weakening, and along with it, patriarchy. But until more information is literally unearthed, any conclusion about the weakening of the nuclear family and patriarchy is no more than guesswork. (3) Women shared in the destiny of their families. They could not have escaped economic and political insecurity by leaving their families behind. (4) Women worked mostly in the house, caring for their families; but they were also in the fields harvesting and doing other odd jobs in order to ensure their families' survival. Social and ideological boundaries that engender physical boundaries tend to become permeable when economic survival is at stake. (5) The privilege of birthing life into the world was very

²³² Varro, *De re rustica* 2.10.8–9, LCL 409–11.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 2.10.9, trans. Hooper, rev. Ash, LCL 411.

²³⁴ This true story comes to me from a friend of mine who was stationed in Turkey during his stint in the army in the 1960s. He says he observed on more than one occasion women giving birth like this.

dangerous. Even with the successful results in the three anecdotes cited above, the stories still point to a high maternal death rate. (6) Despite their hardships, peasants were still the backbone of the macroeconomy of the Greco-Roman world. If individual families and even those in a given region hit hard by a bad year in production slid down the slippery slope into ruin, the majority were still productive, contributing members of society.

Slaves. Although in the model they are placed below the day laborers and, indeed, had the lowest status in the empire, slaves occupied every corner of the Greco-Roman world, from field-worker peasants to retainers of huge estates, to domestics, and to artisans. But because most slaves in the East, numbering about 10 percent of the population,²³⁵ worked in the city, usually as domestics of the wealthy, we will delay discussing them until the next chapter.²³⁶

²³⁵ MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations*, 92.

²³⁶ This a debated point. For a rural setting see Luke 17:7–10. Whether slaves were rural or urban, my remarks are so general that they remain unaffected by the debate and can be applied to either setting. For slavery in Jewish society, see Safrai, “Home and Family,” 751. For the Greek East, see C. Whittaker, “Rural Labor in Three Roman Provinces,” in *Non-slave Labour* (ed. Garnsey) 73–99; and Broughton, “Roman Asia Minor,” 691. Levick, *Roman Colonies*, 98, finds no evidence of rural slaves in Pisidian Antioch. For an opposing view, see Ste. Croix, *Class Struggle*, 133–34, 144. He cites Jones and Finley, however, as disagreeing with his opinion (p. 144).