9. Aliens and Strangers? The Socioeconomic Location of the Addressees of 1 Peter

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Recent years have seen a lively discussion of the socioeconomic level of the earliest Christians. A so-called "old consensus" that they came from among the poor, usually attributed to Adolf Deissmann (not entirely accurately), was replaced in the 1970s and 80s with a so-called "new consensus" that they represented a cross-section of urban society and included some individuals of relatively high wealth and status.1 The initial impetus for this "new consensus" was provided by Edwin Judge,2 but the main foundations were laid in Gerd Theissen's essay on social stratification in the Corinthian community, first published in 1974.3 Report of an "emerging consensus" was first announced, and further supported, by Abraham Malherbe in his Social Aspects of Early Christianity, published in 1977.4 A further significant contribution to the establishment of this consensus was a chapter on the social level of the Pauline Christians in Wayne Meeks's classic and wide-ranging treat-

1. For an overview of the discussion to the mid-1990s, see David G. Horrell, The Social Ethos of the Corinthian Correspondence: Interests and Ideology from 1 Corinthians to 1 Clement, Studies of the New Testament and Its World (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), pp. 91-101.


7. E.g., John K. Chow, Patronage and Power: A Study of Social Networks in Corinth, JSNTSup 75 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992); Andrew D. Clarke, Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth: A Socio-Historical and Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 1-6, AGAJU 18 (Leiden: Brill, 1993). My own earlier study broadly followed the "new consensus" picture but was more cautious about the socioeconomic level of the members: "we can hardly state with confidence that the most socially prominent members of the Corinthian congregation belong to the 'elite,' the 'ruling class,' of Corinth. . . . Nevertheless, there do seem to be at least some members of the ἄρχοντες who are relatively well-to-do, who are heads of households which include slaves, the owners of accommodation of some size, and people with some wealth at their disposal" (Horrell, Social Ethos, p. 98). I would now be still more cautious, especially regarding wealth and housing (cf. David G. Horrell, "Domestic Space and Christian Meetings at Corinth: Imagining New Contexts and the Buildings East of the Theatre," NTS 50 [2004]: 349-69), but would affirm the conclusion that the churches included a range of people from urban society (cf. Horrell, Social Ethos, pp. 100-101).


tial attempt to develop a more sophisticated and detailed model that avoids this criticism has been made by Steven Friesen, who outlines a “poverty scale” for Roman urban society with seven categories, ranging from the super-wealthy imperial elites (Ps) to those below subsistence level (Ps7). 10 It is important to note, though, that Friesen concurs with Meggitt's central arguments: that there is little if any evidence to place any of the Pauline Christians into the category of the wealthy elite (Ps7); and that the vast majority of the empire's inhabitants, and of the early Christians, were poor, living around or not much above subsistence level. 11

It is unsurprising that the discussion of the socioeconomic level of the earliest Christians has focused heavily on the Pauline letters. Though even here the evidence is scanty, there are at least snippets of prosopographical and other information to consider within a literary deposit of some size. 1 Peter, on the other hand, in this as in other respects, stands relatively neglected. This, too, is unsurprising: it is one relatively short letter, the authorship and date of which are open to discussion and which provides no significant prosopographical data, at least concerning the addressees of the letter. 12 Yet 1 Peter deserves more careful attention than it has generally received. It is, after all, addressed to Christians across a wide geographical area and constitutes precious early evidence concerning the introduction and spread of Christianity in Asia Minor. John Elliott describes it as "one of the most socially significant writings of the early church." 13

Indeed, the main exception to this general neglect is Elliott's groundbreaking and influential study, A Home for the Homeless, the first social-scientific study of the letter, which attempts, among other things, to provide a "social profile" of the addressees of the letter. The starting point for Elliott's analysis of the letter is an argument for the correlation and central importance of two key terms: πάροικος and οίκος (τοῦ θεοῦ). These terms, Elliott proposes, "are not merely linguistic but also sociological and theological correlates." 14 They therefore invite consideration as to the ways in which they "provide clues to the social condition of the addressees as well as to the socioreligious response offered by the document itself." 15

After examining the meaning and use of πάροικος and related terms in both secular and biblical texts, Elliott concludes that it refers to those "living or living as a resident alien in a foreign environment or away from home." 16 More specifically, the term πάροικος denotes the "resident alien," while παρεπιθηκός refers to the "transient stranger." 17 Furthermore, Elliott argues that in 1 Peter the description of the addressees as πάροικοι and παρεπιθηκοί (see 1:1, 17; 2:11) refers to their "actual political and social condition." 18

13. John H. Elliott, A Home for the Homeless: A Social-Scientific Criticism of 1 Peter, Its Situation and Strategy, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990 [first ed. 1981]), p. xxii. It is curious that 1 Peter does not receive more attention in Stephen Mitchell's massive and magisterial treatment of Anatolia, on which I am dependent for much of the broader information about Asia Minor below. Discussing the origins of Christianity in Anatolia, Mitchell focuses on Paul's mission and letter to the Galatians, while later describing the testimony of Pliny's famous letter (10.96) as "a unique and unparalleled claim that Christianity had established a major hold on northern Asia Minor by the early second century" (Anatolia: Land, Men, and Gods in Asia Minor, Volume II: The Rise of the Church [Oxford: Clarendon, 1995], p. 37; see pp. 37-38). Mitchell's only substantive comment on 1 Peter is to note that, insofar as there was an early Christian missisn in the areas north of the extent of Paul's activity, "the evangelist was surely Peter, who addressed the Jews of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia in his first epistle" (Mitchell, Anatolia II, p. 3).

17. Elliott, Home, p. 34.
18. Elliott, Home, p. 35. This is somewhat qualified on p. 42, where Elliott notes that "[t]here is neither need nor reason to postulate mutually exclusive literal/figurative options here...[T]hese words in 1 Peter are used to describe religious as well as social circumstances," and further in his more recent commentary (John H. Elliott, 1 Peter: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, AB37B [New York: Doubleday, 2000], p. 482):
description thus gives us a concrete indication as to their socioeconomic situation: they are “resident aliens and transient strangers” who “shared the same vulnerable condition of the many thousands of Jewish and other ethnic paroikoi of Asia Minor and throughout the Roman empire.” Indeed, in summarizing the findings of his opening chapter, Elliott makes clear how fundamentally his conclusions as to the significance of the designation παροικοί και παρεπιδήμοι shape his reflections on the social profile of the addressees:

In 1 Peter the terms paroikia, paroikoi and parepidēmēs identify the addressees as a combination of displaced persons who are currently aliens permanently residing in (paroikia, paroikoi) or strangers temporarily visiting or passing through (parepidēmēs) the four provinces of Asia Minor named in the salutation (1:1). These terms . . . indicate not only the geographical dislocation of the recipients but also the political, legal, social and religious limitations and estrangement which such displacement entails. As paroikoi they may well have been numbered among the rural population and villagers who had been relocated to city territories and assigned inferior status to the citizenry. And as both paroikoi and parepidēmēs they may have been included among the numerous immigrant artisans, craftsmen, traders, merchants residing permanently in or temporarily traveling through the villages, towns and cities of the eastern provinces.

Elliott’s next chapter expands many of these observations in offering a “social profile” of the addressees of 1 Peter. For Elliott, the “limited” urbanization of much of Asia Minor combined with the “internal evidence” of 1 Peter “suggest[s] that the letter is directed to a predominantly rural audience.”

“The experience of many as actual strangers and resident aliens provided an existential basis for the depiction of all believers as strangers and resident aliens in a metaphorical sense.”

21. Elliott, Home, pp. 62-63. Note, however, that this conclusion is both reiterated and qualified in what follows: most παροικοί were located in rural areas (p. 68), and this is where most of the addressees were likely to be located (p. 69), but “the letter is intended for Christians in the cities also” (p. 69) and the reference to ὑπηκοός (2:18-20) suggests an urban location (p. 69). Nonetheless, in his more recent commentary, Elliott reiterates the likely “rural location of the letter’s addressees,” which “marks 1 Peter as a notable exception to the generalization that early Christianity everywhere constituted an ‘urban phenomenon’” (Elliott, 1 Peter, p. 90).

The Christian communities in view contained a mix of Jews and non-Jews, though mostly the latter. And the conclusion that the addressees were παροικοὶ forms the basis for a series of suggestions about their likely legal, economic, and social status: excluded from civic rights, mostly (though not exclusively) in rural areas and involved in agriculture, generally “from the working proletariat of the urban and rural areas” and in “an inferior economic position.”

These are the main contours of contemporary scholarship with which this present study must engage. In the examination of the socioeconomic status of the addressees of 1 Peter that follows, the findings will be related to the current “new consensus” debate focused on the Pauline evidence, as sketched above. More specifically, Elliott’s influential proposals concerning the recipients of the letter will provide a set of hypotheses to test.

1. The Socioeconomic Structure of the Roman Empire

Before considering the specific evidence from the letter itself, it is important to provide a broader sketch of the Roman economy and of the developments in Asia Minor in the period with which we are concerned.

Moses Finley’s The Ancient Economy, first published in 1973, remains a landmark study, particularly important for presenting a so-called “primitivist” view of the Roman economy: primarily dependent on agriculture, with land-ownership as the main form of wealth and cities as essentially centers of consumption, dependent on the produce and wealth generated from the land. Trade and industry remained mostly small-scale and rudimentary. The empire itself made significant demands in terms of taxation, both in cash but also, importantly, in kind, with much agricultural produce needed to supply grain to Rome and also to support military presence and activity.

Subsequent studies have challenged and revised aspects of this depiction but have affirmed the essential outlines of Finley’s primitivist portrait.
Richard Duncan-Jones comments that “[t]he Roman economy remained a primitive system which would today qualify the Roman Empire for recognition as a ‘developing’ country. Almost everywhere a large part of the population was engaged in agriculture at a relatively low level, while industry depended on a backward technology and was rarely organised in large units.” Robin Osborne, writing in 2006, characterizes the Roman economy as an “underdeveloped,” preindustrial economy based fundamentally on agriculture and with a largely rural population. Life expectancy was very low — estimates suggest around twenty to thirty at birth — and there was widespread malnutrition and periodic famine.

In terms of the overall socioeconomic structure of the empire’s population, there is widespread agreement that wealth and power were heavily concentrated in relatively few hands, with the richest elites comprising in total only around 1 percent of the population. The concentration of wealth in few hands in a pre-industrial, agriculturally based economy implies the corollary that the majority of the empire’s population did not live comfortably; as Meggitt and Friesen have stressed, “the overwhelming majority of the population under Roman imperialism lived near the subsistence level.”

Nonetheless, there is good reason to try to press beyond the binary model — a very rich, an undifferentiated mass of the poor — found in financial systems, are not in dispute. However, most commentators are more positive about the level and nature of economic activity that took place within this framework” (Kevin Greene, “Technological Innovation and Economic Progress in the Ancient World: M. I. Finley Re-Considered,” The Economic History Review, New Series 53, no. 1 [2000]: 29-59, at p. 52). On the primitivism/modernism debate, see also Meggitt, Paul, pp. 41-73, who supports Finley’s “primitivist” picture.

29. See Alföldy, Social History, p. 147; Scheidel, “Stratification,” p. 42 with n. 6; Stegemann and Stegemann, Jesus Movement, p. 77, who suggest between 1 and 5 percent for the upper stratum as a whole. For more detailed calculations, leading to the conclusion that “the richest elites made up only about 1.25% of the empire’s inhabitants,” see Friesen, “Poverty in Pauline Studies,” pp. 360-61.
30. Friesen, “Poverty in Pauline Studies,” p. 343; Meggitt, Paul, passim; Stegemann and Stegemann, Jesus Movement, pp. 88-93.

It is notable that the figures are most speculative in categories 4 and 5, as Friesen indicates with question marks. This is unfortunate, since, as John Barclay remarks, it is precisely here that the distinctions are crucial: How much is “moderate surplus” and how many of the population (and, more specifically, of the early Christians) might have lived at this level?

However, a recent essay by Walter Scheidel specifically addresses this issue, arguing for a sizeable “middling group” comprising 20-25 percent of Roman society. Drawing on Scheidel’s work, Bruce Longenecker argues that the percentages in Friesen’s scale should be revised, with the category of moderate surplus (PS4) increased to include around 17 percent of the population, and PS5, 6, and 7 adjusted to 25, 30 and 25 percent respectively. It is

31. For this argument against a binary model, see Scheidel, “Stratification,” pp. 40-45; Longenecker, “Exposing the Economic Middle.” Among the examples Longenecker cites are Tacitus’s contrasts between those who are “virtuous and associated with great houses” and “the dirty plebs” (plebs sordida, Hist 1.4) or between “citizens of repute” and “the rabble” (Ann. 3.36), though in neither of these instances does Tacitus simply give a binary view of Roman society.
33. See Friesen, “Poverty in Pauline Studies,” pp. 347-45. But the figures in all categories below PS3 are necessarily based on very limited evidence. As Longenecker points out, Friesen’s figures for PS6 and PS7 are derived from a 1993 study by C. R. Whittaker of the poor in the city of Rome, with comparisons with cities in pre-industrial Europe, but Friesen takes the top end of Whittaker’s percentages for PS6 (30-40%) and PS7 (24-28%) — see Friesen, “Poverty in Pauline Studies,” p. 345 n. 69, for his reasons for doing this.
important to note that this still leaves 80 percent of the population living near subsistence level, so the picture of a large majority living in poverty remains. Moreover, it remains to be seen how other ancient historians respond to Scheidel’s proposals and whether his optimistic view of a sizeable “middle class” turns out to be somewhat too optimistic.

These figures, though they remain highly provisional and open to debate, give us a very broad idea of the socioeconomic structure of the empire’s population (albeit, it should be noted, a static snapshot, which does not give any impression of the extent of vulnerability to fluctuation, due, for example, to famine and other changes in circumstance). They do not, of course, tell us anything about where the early Christians fitted into this structure. Nor do they inform us about the particular development of Asia Minor in the period immediately prior to and including the time of 1 Peter’s composition. This is a more specific socioeconomic context within which to read and understand the letter.

2. Roman Imperialism and the Development of Asia Minor

Among a number of significant changes that accompanied the development of Roman imperial domination of Asia Minor, one of the most important was urbanization. By deliberate policy and acts of foundation, new cities were established across the provinces of Asia Minor. After surveying the region.

A term Scheidel uses on p. 54, though he generally speaks of a “middling group,” or something similar. Many ancient historians have rejected the idea that one can speak of a middle class in antiquity, at least in the sense of a “class” that represents a distinctive socioeconomic group with a particular basis for their economic activity, seeing the socioeconomic structure as essentially divided into two: upper and lower strata.


Vant evidence, Stephen Mitchell concludes that “by the end of the Julio-Claudian period most of Pontus, Paphlagonia, north Galatia, Galatian Phrygia, Lycaonia, and Pisidia was divided up between contiguous city territories; only Cappadocia was left outside this pattern of settlement, and remained largely without cities.” Moreover, in the period of the Roman Empire, the inscriptional evidence shows “unequivocally that the plateau was densely populated.” This change makes clear how important it is to distinguish pre-Roman and Roman Asia Minor, and (without denying that the coastal areas of the province of Asia were more densely populated and heavily urbanized than the interior plateau) should lead us to be cautious about regarding 1 Peter as necessarily addressed to predominantly rural areas, a point to which we shall return.

Another major impact of Roman rule was the development of Asia Minor’s network of roads. Facilitating movements of military personnel and supplies, particularly to the Euphrates frontier, was the main reason for this undertaking, but the massive development of the network also, of course, made communications, trade, and travel much easier. The scale of the work should be emphasized: the main highways were, on average, around eight meters wide and covered around 9,000 kilometers. The cost for paying for such an enterprise, which would have been so great as to bankrupt the state and would thus also have been impossible for local communities to bear, leads Mitchell to conclude that the task must have entailed a system of unpaid labor forced upon citizens and slaves, often by the military.

Indeed, military presence—a regular feature of life throughout the region—brought many demands to the communities of Asia Minor. Soldiers were regularly stationed on the roads, protecting routes, collecting fines, and
no doubt taking opportunity to make various demands, legitimate and illegitimate, of the local communities, which had a duty "to feed, clothe, house, and even to provide armour and equipment for the armies." These obligations, Mitchell notes, "were a distinct economic burden." Indeed, much of the agricultural produce, especially grain, paid as tax in kind, was probably used to supply the needs of the military.

As already noted above for the empire generally, so too for Asia Minor, agriculture formed the center of the economy. One of the changes in the Roman period was that — not least due to Roman tax demands forcing people to sell or mortgage their land — "much...of the rural territory of central Anatolia was parcelled out into large estates owned by local city gentry, [and] wealthy aristocrats from further afield," often of Roman or Italian origin. Rural villages formed part of such estates. Many country dwellers were thus "effectively serfs, tied to the land with obligations to provide the landowner with labour and produce."

Overall, the detailed picture of Asia Minor’s development presented by Mitchell makes clear the impact of Roman rule and the associated economic and population expansion. The establishment of cities (with contiguous territories) and a major road network are key infrastructural developments, with the wealth of the elite conspicuously displayed in public buildings, imperial temples, baths, and so on. The concentration of wealth and landownership in relatively few hands fits with the broader outlines of the poverty scale. Indeed, despite the developments of the imperial period, one should not assume that there was any widespread improvement in the economic position of the majority of the population. On the contrary, the demands for taxes and rents, plus the related responsibilities for sustaining the military presence in the region, would have weighed heavily upon the poor, many of whom labored as peasants on land owned by others.

3. The Addressees of 1 Peter

3.1 Aliens and Strangers?

With the contours of recent debate in mind and the broader context of Roman Asia Minor to inform our investigation, we turn to consider the data in 1 Peter. It is important, first, to assess the implications of the depiction of the addressees as πάροικοι καὶ παρεπιθηκοί, since this is central to Elliott's description of their socioeconomic status. Elliott, we recall, took these terms to indicate that the letter's addressees were "resident aliens and transient strangers," identities that had further implications in terms of their inferior social, economic, and political-legal status. It is only fair to note that few have been convinced by this argument.

More recently, Karen Jobes has presented a new variation of this proposal for a literal interpretation of the addressees' identity as πάροικοι καὶ παρεπιθηκοί. Noting the lack of evidence for evangelization of northern Asia Minor, Jobes suggests that "the Christians to whom Peter writes had become Christians elsewhere, had some association with Peter prior to his writing to them, and now found themselves foreigners and resident aliens scattered throughout Asia Minor." One possibility is that the first converts in Asia Minor had been Pentecost pilgrims who heard Peter's preaching in Jerusalem (Acts 2:41). More likely, according to Jobes, is that they were among those (probably Jews) converted during a visit of Peter to Rome in the 40s, then deported from Rome and made part of the extensive colonization of Asia Minor under Claudius. This intriguing theory is, however, subject to many of the same objections brought against Elliott's proposal, which Jobes does not adequately address, and it suffers from major addi-

46. See Mitchell, Anatolia I, pp. 118-24, 141.
50. See Mitchell, Anatolia I, pp. 148-58, with quotation on p. 149. Mitchell includes a third category of landowner here — the Roman emperor himself — though it was only in the second century that emperors began to acquire land in this area (see p. 156).
53. Jobes, 1 Peter, pp. 24-41.
56. Jobes, 1 Peter, pp. 28-41.
57. It is certainly not the case that "[t]he primary objection to Elliott's specific social reconstruction has been that the relationships between the social and economic classes in first-century Asia Minor are too complex, and the terms that refer to them are understood
tional difficulties: (1) the uncertainty about any visit of Peter to Rome in the 40s and the requirement of an early date for 1 Peter; (2) the lack of any positive evidence to associate Jews expelled from Rome with colonists arriving in Asia Minor in this period (the evidence for the foundation of the Jewish communities of Asia Minor indicates that they were well established from the first century BC and began earlier still);58 (3) most crucially, a misunderstanding of the character and development of Roman colonies in Asia Minor. Early on, these were indeed true colonies, involving the settlement of Roman veterans and others from Rome, but increasingly, especially in Claudius’s time, entailed the creation of \textit{titular colonies}, that is, the giving of a colonial title to an \textit{existing} city as an honor.59

One problem with Elliott’s argument has been highlighted by Steven Bechtler, namely, that in extra-biblical Greek the term πάροικος is used to denote a non-citizen, whether native or non-native, rather than a resident alien as such.60 As Mitchell notes, the rural population of Anatolia was often described as πάροικοι, περιοικοί, κάτοικοι, καμαθηματικοί, or simply as the λαός.61 As such, the description of the addressess as πάροικοι might still allow a significant deduction to be made about their social, political, and economic status. Yet there are also telling differences with Elliott’s argument for taking this description in a literal, socio-political sense.

The recipients of the letter are initially addressed, as a group, as παροικοί (1:1), while in 1:17 they are said to live out a παροικία, and in 2:11 are exhorted to παροικίαν καὶ παρεπιδήμοιο. The noun παρεπιδήμος is rare in Greek literature and occurs only twice in the LXX (Gen 23:4; Ps 38:13).62 Its pairing with πάροικος in 2:11 suggests that the words function in 1 Peter as a \textit{hendiadys}, both equally appropriate to describe the addressess, which implies that the author is using the terms to convey something about the character of their experience rather than their literal socio-political status (in which case someone would be either a πάροικος or a παρεπιδήμος). More crucially still, the use of παρεπιδήμος, and the phrase pairing πάροικος with παρεπιδήμος, indicates the decisive influence of the LXX on the author’s language. Specifically, 2:11 appropriates the language with which Abraham voices the nature of his residence among the Hittites (Gen 23:4). There Abraham describes himself as a “\textit{stranger and alien}” (πάροικος καὶ παρεπιδήμος).63 Further texts in the LXX, echoing this self-description, already indicate a kind of broadening or spiritualizing of the term, beyond a strictly literal or socio-political designation.64 Perhaps the clearest example is in 1 Chron 29:15: πάροικοι ἔσμεν ἐναντίον σου (i.e., YHWH), clearly spiritualizing to some extent, since the verse ends: “our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no abiding” (ESV).65 This does not deny that the terms, at least in 1 Peter, are used to depict a sense of social alienation or estrangement from the world due to the hostility of the wider society, which seems to me a key point in Elliott’s argument.66 It does, however, strongly suggest that the terms as used in 1 Peter do not reflect their use as socio-political designations in Greco-Roman society but rather their use in Jewish tradition to express the alienation and estrangement of God’s people from the world.67 As such, \textit{pace} επετήριοι (1:1), while in 1:17 they are said to live out a παροικία, and in 2:11 are exhorted ἐν παροικίᾳ καὶ παρεπιδήμῳ. The noun παρεπιδήμος is rare in Greek literature and occurs only twice in the LXX (Gen 23:4; Ps 38:13).62 Its pairing with πάροικος in 2:11 suggests that the words function in 1 Peter as a \textit{hendiadys}, both equally appropriate to describe the addressess, which implies that the author is using the terms to convey something about the character of their experience rather than their literal socio-political status (in which case someone would be either a πάροικος or a παρεπιδήμος). More crucially still, the use of παρεπιδήμος, and the phrase pairing πάροικος with παρεπιδήμος, indicates the decisive influence of the LXX on the author’s language. Specifically, 2:11 appropriates the language with which Abraham voices the nature of his residence among the Hittites (Gen 23:4). There Abraham describes himself as a “\textit{stranger and alien}” (πάροικος καὶ παρεπιδήμος).63 Further texts in the LXX, echoing this self-description, already indicate a kind of broadening or spiritualizing of the term, beyond a strictly literal or socio-political designation.64 Perhaps the clearest example is in 1 Chron 29:15: πάροικοι ἐσμέν ἐναντίον σου (i.e., YHWH), clearly spiritualizing to some extent, since the verse ends: “our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no abiding” (ESV).65 This does not deny that the terms, at least in 1 Peter, are used to depict a sense of social alienation or estrangement from the world due to the hostility of the wider society, which seems to me a key point in Elliott’s argument.66 It does, however, strongly suggest that the terms as used in 1 Peter do not reflect their use as socio-political designations in Greco-Roman society but rather their use in Jewish tradition to express the alienation and estrangement of God’s people from the world.67 As such, \textit{pace}
Elliott, the terms describe not the addressees' socio-legal status prior to conversion but their socio-spiritual status consequent on their conversion. Unfortunately, therefore, this designation of the addressees can tell us nothing about their concrete socioeconomic status.

If the addressees are not literally πάροικοι, then one major reason to identify them as (mostly) rural dwellers also disappears (see above with n. 21). Other reasons adduced by Elliott — the limited urbanization of much of Asia Minor and the rural metaphors used in the letter (Elliott lists 1:22-24; 2:25; and 5:2-4)⁶⁸ — are also questionable. Bechtler has rightly pointed out that the supposedly rural metaphors could just as well be used by urban authors for urbanized audiences (cf. 1 Cor 9:7-10; Gal 6:7-8) and has noted that many of the images in the letter are not especially rural.⁶⁹ And, as we have seen, one of the most obvious impacts of Roman rule was the establishment of a network of urban centers, linked by a comprehensive network of roads. While, as elsewhere, the majority of the population remained rural, the character of Asia Minor in the first two centuries CE cannot itself substantially support the hypothesis that 1 Peter was primarily addressed to rural areas. Indeed, there are some reasons to suggest the opposite, beyond the general observation that early Christianity seemed initially to spread through the empire as a primarily urban phenomenon. Since the letter addresses itself to Christians spread across a vast geographical area, it seems likely, a priori, that what was envisaged was a distribution (using the road and pathway network) linking urban settlements. More significantly, the facility in Greek one could expect among the population would be higher in the towns than in the countryside. Knowledge of the Greek language was widespread in the country as well as the cities,⁷⁰ but the epigraphic evidence shows that the Greek used in the cities was the "orthodox regular language of high culture," while the Greek of the countryside was much more variegated, "deformed" grammatically and orthographically.⁷¹ It is also in the rural areas that indigenous languages persisted most strongly.⁷² Questions remain about the precise quality of the Greek of 1 Pe-

ter,⁷³ but it is clearly a literary text that demands a good level of facility in the language in order to understand it. This does not by any means prove that it was written with urban congregations in mind, but it does make this scenario somewhat more likely than that the addressees were mostly in rural areas.

Pliny makes a relevant comment when he remarks that Christianity has spread through "not only the towns, but villages and rural districts too" (Ep. 10.96.9: Neque civitates tantum, sed vicis etiam atque agros . . .). While this reveals that Christianity, by the time of Pliny's letter (c. 111-12 CE), was indeed evident in the countryside as well as the cities, the wording also implies that Christianity was initially and most naturally an urban phenomenon that had by this time — the early second century — begun to spread even to the rural areas.⁷⁴

3.2 Socioeconomic Status

Elliott's interpretation of the addressees of 1 Peter as πάροικοι and παρεπιθύμοι formed the basis, as we have seen, for a clear hypothesis regarding their socioeconomic level: generally, they were "from the working proletariat of the urban and rural areas," mostly the latter, and in "an inferior economic position."⁷⁵ If Elliott's interpretation of the terms πάροικοι and παρεπιθύμοι does not in the end convince, then all the associated implications about the status and location of the addressees also fall away. We need then to return to the letter to ask whether there are any other hints concerning the socioeconomic location of the recipients. There are indeed a few points worthy of attention, mostly (though not exclusively) in the so-called domestic code (2:18-3:7), even if the amount of evidence they represent is slim.

⁷⁰. Jobes's comment that "Greek or Latin was spoken only by administrative officials" (Jobes, 1 Peter, p. 20) — cited in n. 42 above — is certainly inaccurate.
⁷¹. See Mitchell, Anatolia I, pp. 174-75, who notes that "the Greek language was widely if unevenly adopted in the countryside of Anatolia" and that "a majority of the inhabitants of Asia Minor were, in some measure, bilingual in Greek and an indigenous language."
⁷². Mitchell, Anatolia I, p. 50; see further pp. 50-51, 172-75.
⁷³. See, e.g., Jobes's recent attempt to demonstrate that the Greek of 1 Peter may well reflect the work of someone for whom Greek was not the first language; Jobes, 1 Peter, pp. 6-8, 325-38.
⁷⁴. Cf. Judge, Social Pattern, p. 61. "Pliny accepted the fact that Christians represented a broad cross-section of society, from Roman citizens downwards, but reserved his surprise, apart from their numbers, in which he is an alarmist, for the ominous fact that the new religion was infecting not merely the cities, but the countryside. Until then however we may safely regard Christianity as a socially well backed movement of the great Hellenistic cities."
⁷⁵. Judge, Social Pattern, p. 61. Judge's view of Christianity as a movement dominated by the well-to-do of the cities is open to serious question, but his point about the primarily urban focus of early Christianity seems better founded.
⁷⁶. Elliott, Home, p. 70.
It is significant that the first group the writer addresses specifically in this table of ethical instruction is the oikēτας. This designation, as opposed to the more generic and common δοῦλοι, suggests that these are domestic slaves, used in the household rather than in agricultural or industrial activity. This does not exclude the possibility of a rural location, though it is more likely to point to an urban context, where the majority of oikēτας were used. Given the variety of slave roles and status, and of owners’ treatment of their slaves, it would be misleading to imply that the socioeconomic standing of all slaves was identical. Nonetheless, in general slaves were allocated rations, clothing, and living quarters that were basic, amounting to “a fairly bleak material regime for most Roman slaves.” This does not mean that slaves’ living conditions were necessarily any worse than for many of the empire’s free poor; indeed, slaves may have had somewhat greater material security given their owners’ duty and incentive to provide for them. But, as Keith Bradley points out, “slaves were especially vulnerable in times of crisis”; Dio, for example, refers to an occasion in 6 CE when, due to a severe famine in Rome, gladiators and the slaves that were for sale “were banished to a distance of one hundred miles.” Moreover, Bradley notes, “[e]ven when food was not in short supply it was axiomatic that slaves should eat the poorest and cheapest food in the household.” All this implies that, despite the inevitable risk of overgeneralizing, we should place the oikēτας in PS6, that is, “at subsistence level,” with the possibility that some might slip into PS7, especially during times when food was particularly scarce.

77. A point also made by Elliott, Home, p. 69. An inscription from Sardis detailing the estate of Mnesimachus, which includes villages with their inhabitants, shows that the word oikēτας could also be used of slaves in such rural contexts; see Broughton, “Roman Asia Minor,” pp. 631-32.
78. Slaves were appointed to a range of positions, with a consequently varied status, both in rural and urban contexts. On the variety of roles, material welfare, and power, see Keith Bradley, Slavery and Society at Rome (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 55-80.
79. See Bradley, Slavery and Society, pp. 81-106, with quotation on p. 89; also Meggitt, Paul, p. 54 n. 65.
80. Bradley, Slavery and Society, p. 92.

It is difficult to know what significance to draw from the fact that slave-owners are not directly addressed in the household code. Elliott takes this to “suggest that pagan masters are assumed,” such that there is no corresponding group of owners/masters within the churches addressed. This is, however, a precarious assumption, given the other New Testament texts where reciprocal teaching is also lacking, but where the existence of household-heads among the believers is explicitly indicated. Indeed, as we shall see below, there are some indications of the presence of male heads of household among the addressees of the letter.

The instruction to wives (3:1-6) supports the view that, in at least some instances, Christian slaves, and certainly Christian wives, were in households where the paterfamilias was not a Christian (3:1-2). Given the general view that it was the duty of household members to follow the religion(s) of the head of the household, it is unsurprising if these Christians found themselves in situations of particular difficulty, where suffering for their faith might well occur. It is understandable in such a context that the author’s advice to wives is to make their new faith appealing through their pure and quiet demeanor rather than through speaking about it aloud (ἀνέπληγον; 3:1-2). Nonetheless, despite the arguments of some commentators, the author does not imply that marriage to a non-believer was by any means the norm for wives in the churches. Nor, we might suggest, was it necessarily the norm for Christian slaves to have non-Christian owners. The instruction to “be subject to your own husbands,” etc., applies equally to those believing husbands, as the example of Sarah and Abraham suggests.

83. Elliott, 1 Peter, p. 516.
84. Elliott, 1 Peter, p. 95.
85. See esp. the instruction to slaves in 1 Tim 6:1-2 and Titus 2:9-10, where it is elsewhere made clear that the leaders of the churches are heads of household (’1 Tim 3:1-2; Titus 1:5-7).
86. See Plutarch, Mor. 140D; David L. Balch, Let Wives Be Submissive: The Domestic Code in 1 Peter, SRLMS 26 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1981); Elliott, 1 Peter, pp. 557-58.
87. Bovell, First Epistle of Peter, p. 153, commenting on εἶναι δικαιούς, asserts: “There is no suggestion that these are exceptional cases; the implication of the whole passage, on the contrary, is that the women whom he is addressing are nearly all married to pagan husbands.” Elliott more correctly interprets the force of the phrase: “The conditional formulation ‘even if’ (καί οὖν) indicates that the author allows for the fact that ‘some’ (tines) of the husbands mentioned in v 1b may be nonbelievers” (Elliott, 1 Peter, p. 557).
88. Pace Achtemeier, 1 Peter, p. 210. “What is clear is that the conduct of wives with non-
The instruction to wives concerning their proper adornment (κόσμους) — not the external adornment of braided hair, gold, and clothing, but the inner adornment of a gentle and quiet spirit (3:4) — picks up a topos common in Jewish, Greek, and Roman moral exhortation. Plutarch expresses the point in a very similar way: “Adornment” [κόσμους], said Crates, “is what adorns; and what adorns a woman is what makes her better ordered [κοσμιώτεραν] — not gold, nor emerald nor scarlet, but whatever gives an impression of dignity [σεμνότητα], discipline [ευταξία], and modesty [αιδός].” In early Christian literature there is an especially close parallel in 1 Tim 2:9-10, and, as Elliott notes, the church fathers show considerable interest in this text in 1 Peter, taking it to establish “an authoritative prohibition of external adornment for Christian women.”

Bruce Winter has drawn attention to the emergence of so-called “new women” from the first century BCE onwards — women who, at least in the eyes of their critics, adorned themselves elaborately and were sexually promiscuous. He argues that this is a relevant background for understanding the instructions to women and wives in the Pauline communities (especially the Pastoral Epistles). If a similar background is in view in 1 Peter, then this author, too, may be reacting against the (potential) influence of these new values on the wives of the Christian communities. Winter sees the phenomenon of the “new woman” as one originating in upper-class Roman circles, but he notes that the influence of these values filtered down through society.

For Elliott, this echo of “conventional sentiments concerning appropriate attire . . . reveals little or nothing about the actual social status of the Christian husbands is the chief concern of the author here.” This emphasis enables Achatmeier to make the implausible claim that this passage (3:1-6) says “nothing . . . about the general status of women within the Christian community, or within Christian marriage” (p. 208), but that 3:7 indicates the “equality between men and women inherent within the Christian community” (p. 219), an “equality . . . enjoined as a Christian duty” (p. 209).

90. Mor. 141D (Greek text and ET from Sarah B. Pomeroy, ed., Plutarch’s Advice to the Bride and Groom and A Consolation to His Wife. English Translations, Commentary, Interpretative Essays, and Bibliography [New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999]), also cited in Elliott, 1 Peter, p. 563. Cf. also Mor. 144D, 145E-146. For comparable statements from a Pythagorean community, see Elliott, 1 Peter, pp. 563-64 with n. 174. For critique of women’s finery in the Jewish tradition, see Isa 31:6-12; T. Reub. 51:1-6; Philo, Sac. 21; Virt. 39-40.


93. Elliott, 1 Peter, p. 564.

94. Beare, First Epistle of Peter, p. 155.

95. E.g., because Caius is host to the whole church at Corinth, he “is evidently a man of some wealth” (Meeks, The First Urban Christians, p. 57); Phoebe functions as a “protector or patroness of many Christians” and so “is an independent woman . . . who has some wealth” (p. 60). Cf. also Theissen, Social Setting, pp. 69-119. A striking example is found in AnthonyThielson’s recent comments on Chloe: on the basis solely of the reference to οἱ Χλωρίς (1 Cor 12:11) and the view that “in its first-century Roman period the city [of Corinth] hummed with wealth” she is seen as a “businesswoman” who has likely sent her “middle managers to Corinth” to conduct her business on her behalf (Anthony C. Thielson. First Corinthians: A Shorter Exegetical and Pastoral Commentary [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006], pp. 6-7; cf. Thielson, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, NIGTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000], p. 121, where she is termed a “wealthy Asian woman”). For the most extended and penetrating critique of such deductions, see Meggitt, Paul.
meaningful. There is precious little information, of course, to enable us to define what "enough wealth" might mean here and where these wives might be placed on the poverty scale. On the one hand, warning against such external adornment by no means requires that the level of wealth is that of the highest social groups (Ps 5-3), of whose presence there is no hint in the letter. On the other hand, it does suggest that these are people living above bare subsistence (Ps 5-7), with some surplus resources at least at times. That would suggest Ps 4.

The instruction to Christian husbands (3:7) — whether their wives are assumed to be Christian or not — yields no relevant information on their likely socioeconomic status, though we can assume that this is the same as (and certainly not lower than) their wives, so, for at least, probably Ps 4. There may be a little more information, though still only minimal data, in the later reference to πρεσβυτέροι (5:1-5). Commentators have long debated what exactly this term denotes and whether it refers primarily to age or to a position of leadership. Alastair Campbell has persuasively argued that, at this early period of Christian history, the term refers not to an ecclesiastical office as such, nor simply to age, but rather to a position of seniority, denoting those who are leaders of the early Christian communities by virtue of their social position as heads of households. This helps to explain, on the one hand, why the term has some associations that seem primarily to do with age (cf. 5:5; also 1 Clem 3:3; 5:1-2; Tit 2:2-4), and, on the other hand, why the terms πρεσβυτέρος and ἐπίσκοπος (here ἐπίσκοπος) are inter-

96. Jobes, 1 Peter, p. 204. In fact, Jobes also refers here to the addressees as being "among the 'foreigners and resident aliens'" of Asia Minor, but for critique of her view on this description of the letter's recipients, see above.

97. Domestic slaves could sometimes be elaborately dressed by their owners, including jewelry, though this was a means to display the wealth and status of their owners, who would be even more sumptuously dressed, and was not something over which slaves had any control (see Bradley, Slavery and Society, pp. 89-93).

98. Cf. Jobes, 1 Peter, pp. 207-8, who makes the point that this instruction may include the situation of a husband with an unbelieving wife.


100. ἐπισκοποῦντες should probably be accepted here, though it is omitted in A and B. It is supported by P72, N, A, W, 33, 69, 1729. For discussion, see Bruce M. Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart and New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), p. 625; J. Ramsey Michaels, 1 Peter, WBC 49 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1988), p. 276 n. 13.

101. There is evidently also some connection with seniority in the faith (cf. 1 Cor 16:15-18; 1 Tim 3:4-6), hence the corresponding instruction here to νεώτεροι, a term Elliott persuasively argues to refer to "the most recent converts of the community." The πρεσβυτέροι addressed in 1 Peter, then, may well include some of the masters and husbands whose slaves and wives are also members of the community. These male heads of household have a responsibility as leaders of the churches and are instructed in this role. What one can reasonably deduce from this about their socioeconomic level, however, is rather little, except insofar as the information about wives suggests at least some husbands in Ps 4. Nothing requires or implies that such senior figures, even if they be heads of households, have wealth or high social status. (Similarly, while the vocabulary of "doing good" [cf. 212, 14-15; 3:16-17; 4:19; etc.] could be used to describe the energeticism of wealthy benefactors, it is by no means restricted to such deeds, as 2:20 [and probably 3:6] clearly shows, together with the scriptural texts whose language is quoted in 3:10-11. Thus these references cannot be taken to indicate anything about the socioeconomic standing of the addressees — and particularly the male householders — of the letter. If some of their households

102. Cf. 1 Clem. 4:2-4:5; 4:4-5; Titus 1:5-7. Notably parallel to the use of πρεσβυτέροι, ποιμάνοι, and ἐπισκόποι in 1 Pet 5:1-2 is Acts 20:27, 28, where the same three roots are used to describe the position and calling of the Ephesian church leaders.

103. Elliott, 1 Peter, p. 849; see pp. 836-40 for the weighing of various scholarly proposals.

104. Among the instructions given to them is a warning to fulfill their responsibilities μὴ ἀρκοῦντες (5:3). Although this word seems only here in the NT and LXX, related words and similar warnings are found elsewhere, notably in the Pastoral's instructions to church leaders (see 1 Tim 5:3-8; 6:10; 2 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:7, 11) as well as Heb 13:15; 1 Pet 3:16; 5:1; 1 Cor 7:7, 13; 1 Tim 5:18; etc.). When listing the qualities required of a military general, Onosander mentions that he should be frugal and not given to avarice (De Imp. Off. 1.1). Indeed, as Elliott, 1 Peter, notes, it was "conventional opinion that the gaining (kerádino) of wealth for oneself was highly shameful (aischos)" (p. 829, with ref. in n. 679). It is therefore unsurprising that early Christian leaders were warned against such greed, especially given the established obligation of congregations to provide support for leaders (e.g., 1 Cor 9:4-14; 11:7-15). But I do not think the warning in itself says anything significant about the socioeconomic level of the πρεσβυτέροι.
include οἰκέται, as we may plausibly assume, then they would not appear to be among the most destitute, and, of course, they would have a social status higher than that of the slaves they own, even if they own only one or two. 106 Again, we might very tentatively point to PS4-5 as a plausible but by no means necessary location for such people. The specific data, it is clear, are very limited.

Conclusions

The first conclusion to be drawn from this survey is a negative one. The description of the addressees as πάροικοι and παρεπιδήμοι cannot serve as an indication of their socioeconomic status. Elliott’s social profile of the addressees — as mostly rural, at the lower end of the economic and social scale — based largely as it is on his conclusions regarding what it meant to be a πάροικος or a παρεπιδήμος, does not bear critical scrutiny. This is an unfortunate conclusion, since Elliott’s ground-breaking work offered the promise of a more detailed socioeconomic profile than is otherwise possible. But the foundations cannot support the edifice. Without the hypothesis about the socioeconomic location of πάροικοι and παρεπιδήμοι, there is much less that can be said about the profile of the letter’s recipients. Nonetheless, some tentative conclusions are still possible.

There is little to support the view that the addressees are mostly country dwellers. Indeed, the hints in the letter and the broader evidence suggest the opposite. Instead of 1 Peter being “a notable exception” to the generally urban focus of earliest Christianity,107 it seems unexceptional insofar as the most likely setting for its addressees is households in urban centers, as we find in the Pauline letters. We should beware of too confident a conclusion here, however, not least due to our ignorance of so much about the location and spread of earliest Christianity. While urban centers emerge most prominently and obviously as the focus of early Christian activity, we can hardly rule out significant Christian presence in villages and the countryside, as Pliny indicates in the early second century (Ep. 10.96.9).

In terms of socioeconomic status, the churches addressed in 1 Peter contained both domestic slaves, relatively low in social status and probably living at subsistence level, and free persons, some of whom may have been male householders and masters whose seniority gave them a position of influence within the community. The women of the communities included at least some with sufficient resources to make elaborate dressing a possibility. While there is clearly insufficient evidence to produce any kind of social profile of the members of these churches, there are at least enough hints to suggest that the addressees of 1 Peter included members from the middle to bottom categories of the poverty scale, PS4-6/7. Allowing for some alarmist exaggeration on Pliny’s part, this is broadly congruent with Pliny’s depiction of the Christians of Pontus: “a great many individuals, of every age and class, both men and women” (Multi enim omnis ætatis, omnis ordinis, utiusque sexus etiam [Ep. 10.96.9]). This is also a conclusion congruent with Friesen’s analysis of the Christians mentioned in Paul’s letters, adding some limited support to that picture of early Christianity’s social composition and, importantly, implying that the addressees of 1 Peter were not distinctive or different in socioeconomic location from those we encounter in the Pauline letters, pace Elliott. In some respects, though, this is also not too far from a kind of severely chastened “new consensus” picture.108 Absent, importantly, are the tenuous deductions that take indications of some surplus resources to imply elite status or considerable wealth. In their place is the insistence that the majority of the empire’s inhabitants lived at or around subsistence level and that such economic realities must be taken into account.109 That changes the picture quite considerably from that presented by Theissen, Meeks, and others, where the impression is given that many of the named individuals mentioned in the Pauline correspondence were “wealthy” or “up-

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106. Cf. Barclay, “Response to Steven Friesen,” p. 365, who comments on Friesen’s proposals: “To place a few, as Friesen tentatively does, among the 7% in PS 4 is to make a claim for substantial wealth stratification in the Pauline churches — much as claimed by Theissen and Meeks, though with different vocabulary.”

107. Elliott, 1 Peter, p. 90.

108. In commenting that the “extreme top and bottom of the Greco-Roman social scale are missing from the picture,” Meeks remarks: “There may well have been members of the Pauline communities who lived at the subsistence level, but we hear nothing of them” (Meeks, The First Urban Christians, p. 73). But if the conclusions embodied in the Poverty Scale are even broadly correct, then it is highly likely that many of the groups mentioned — those who go hungry in 1 Cor 11:21, the οἰκέται of 1 Pet 2:18, etc. — are in precisely this position.
per class.” But — with those important amendments — to conclude that the early Christian communities encompassed a “fair cross-section of urban society,” as Wayne Meeks put it, seems a not unreasonable conclusion to draw from an analysis of the limited evidence in 1 Peter.

Finally, it remains to consider whether this conclusion has consequences for our understanding and interpretation of 1 Peter. Only a few tentative remarks can be offered here. First, without by any means wishing to amalgamate 1 Peter, once again, into the group of later Pauline epistles, the indications concerning its circle of addressees cohere with other aspects of its content to suggest some points of similarity with the Pauline letters and communities. Elliott’s depiction of 1 Peter as a distinctive product “of a Petrine tradition transmitted by Petrine tracts of a Petrine circle,” and addressed, distinctively, to a predominantly rural audience, does not seem to match either the content or envisaged recipients of the letter, notwithstanding the value of his efforts to liberate 1 Peter from its “Pauline bondage.”

Second, while we must be wary of assuming any deterministic link between social context and theological ideas, such that the latter become merely a reflection of the former, it is entirely reasonable to think that the composition of the early Christian communities had some impact on the kind of teaching that emerged from and was addressed to such communities. Several aspects of the character of 1 Peter’s content may perhaps be highlighted in this regard. One is the insertion of the addressees into a (Jewish) narrative of identity that dislocates them from the empire and invites them into a self-understanding based on the experience of dispersion and alienation. If this was not, pace Elliott, the social experience of the addressees prior to conversion, but rather the consequence of that conversion, then we may understand the letter to be reinforcing and deepening that sense of social dislocation for a group of people many of whom may previously have been thoroughly integrated into the fabric of urban social life.

A second aspect concerns what we may term, following Gerd Theissen, the “love-patriarchal” character of the ethical instruction in the letter. According to Theissen, this ethos, which he saw developing in the Pauline and especially post-Pauline letters, served as a means to integrate and sustain the socially diverse early Christian communities. Similarly, if 1 Peter is addressed to communities containing a “fair cross-section” of urban society, from slaves to householders, then its patterns of community-economics may reflect the need to hold such a diverse congregation together. A third and final aspect concerns what I have elsewhere called the “polite resistance” that characterizes the author’s stance toward the wider world, and specifically the empire. While underscoring the need to worship only God (2:17) and to own the name “Christian” boldly, whatever the cost (4:16), the author of 1 Peter urges the recipients of the letter to honor the emperor (2:13-17) and to do what all will recognize and commend as good (2:12, etc.). This may perhaps, at least in part, reflect the socioeconomic location — and socioeconomic diversity — of the addressees, for whom a nuanced and subtle form of accommodated resistance might seem more realistic, not least as a survival strategy, than a more radical and visible stance, such as is promoted in the book of Revelation.

Given the minimal data on which any socioeconomic profile of the addressees of 1 Peter must be based, it would be foolish to construct on that basis a bold theory concerning the impact of this profile on the content of the letter. Theissen coined the term “love-patriarchalism” (Liebespatriarchalismus), drawing on the work of Ernst Troeltsch, and describes it as follows: “This love-patriarchalism takes social differences for granted but ameliorates them through an obligation of respect and love, an obligation imposed on those who are socially stronger. From the weaker are required subordination, fidelity, and esteem” (Social Setting, p. 107).

See Theissen, Social Setting, pp. 107-10, 138-40, 163-64. I have previously criticized the suggestion that this term adequately captures the ethos of the early Pauline letters (specifically 1-2 Corinthians), but I have found it appropriate to designate the character of later letters, such as 1 Clement and the Pastoral: see Horrell, Social Ethics.


Such a tentative suggestion raises a host of further questions, which cannot be explored here, such as whether the author of the book of Revelation is addressing very different kinds of Christian communities. Here I would just want to note that this need not necessarily be so. John’s call to “come out” from the world and resist the Beast may simply represent a more polemical and demanding challenge to his readers, whom he regards as too comfortably assimilated to the world. To echo the terms used by Miroslav Volf, the “difference” John calls for is hard, while that of 1 Peter is softer: see Miroslav Volf, “Soft Difference: Reflections on the Relation Between Church and Culture in 1 Peter,” Ex Audito 10 (1994): 15-30.

letter. Nevertheless, when various facets of the letter’s character, content, and situation seem together to build a coherent picture, we may cautiously hope that social analysis and theological interpretation can be mutually informative and can further develop our understanding of this fascinating text.119

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