

## 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.<sup>1</sup> The initial impetus for this "new consensus" was provided by Edwin Judge,<sup>2</sup> but the main foundations were laid in Gerd Theissen's essay on social stratification in the Corinthian community, first published in 1974.<sup>3</sup> Report of an "emerging consensus" was first announced, and further supported, by Abraham Malherbe in his *Social Aspects of Early Christianity*, published in 1977.<sup>4</sup> 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.

2. Edwin A. Judge, *The Social Pattern of Early Christian Groups in the First Century: Some Prolegomena to the Study of the New Testament Ideas of Social Obligation* (London: Tyndale, 1960).

3. Gerd Theissen, "Soziale Schichtung in der korinthischen Gemeinde: Ein Beitrag zur Soziologie des hellenistischen Urchristentums," *ZNW* 65 (1974): 232-72. ET in Gerd Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1982), pp. 69-119.

4. Abraham J. Malherbe, *Social Aspects of Early Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983 [first ed. 1977]), p. 31.

ment of the first urban Christians, published in 1983.<sup>5</sup> Building on Theissen's detailed analysis, Meeks agreed that "[t]he 'emerging consensus' that Malherbe reports seems to be valid: a Pauline congregation generally reflected a fair cross-section of urban society."<sup>6</sup> This consensus then provided the basis for a wide range of further studies, many of which placed a good deal of weight on the conviction that there were wealthy, elite, ruling class members among the early Pauline congregations.<sup>7</sup>

The relatively uncontroversial development of the "new consensus" perspective was brought to an end in 1998 with the publication of Justin Meggitt's *Paul, Poverty and Survival*.<sup>8</sup> This book constitutes a frontal assault on the new consensus, attacking the reading of the evidence on which its reconstruction is based and insisting that Paul and the earliest Christians shared in the absolute material poverty that was the lot of 99 percent of the Roman Empire's inhabitants. Meggitt's book has generated considerable debate, including some vigorous defense of a "new consensus" position. One of the more telling criticisms has been that Meggitt operates with a somewhat crude binary model, which effectively divides the inhabitants of the Roman Empire into two groups: the elite rich and the 99 percent poor.<sup>9</sup> An influen-

5. Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), pp. 51-73.

6. Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, p. 73.

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 ἐκκλησία 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).

8. Justin J. Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival*, Studies of the New Testament and Its World (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998).

9. See Dale B. Martin, "Review Essay: Justin J. Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival*," *JSNT* 84 (2001): 51-64, at 54-57; Gerd Theissen, "The Social Structure of Pauline Communities: Some Critical Remarks on J. J. Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival*," *JSNT* 84 (2001): 65-84, at 70-75; Steven J. Friesen, "Poverty in Pauline Studies: Beyond the So-called New

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 (PS1) to those below subsistence level (PS7).<sup>10</sup> 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 (PS1-3); 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.<sup>11</sup>

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.<sup>12</sup> 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

Consensus,” *JSNT* 26 (2004): 323-61, at 339; Bengt Holmberg, “The Methods of Historical Reconstruction in the Scholarly ‘Recovery’ of Corinthian Christianity,” in *Christianity at Corinth: The Quest for the Pauline Church*, ed. Edward Adams and David G. Horrell (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox, 2004), pp. 255-71, esp. 261-66; Bruce W. Longenecker, “Exposing the Economic Middle: A Revised Economy Scale for the Study of Early Urban Christianity,” *JSNT* 31 (2009): 243-78. Note the criticisms raised of a binary model in the work of ancient historians by Walter Scheidel, “Stratification, Deprivation and Quality of Life,” in *Poverty in the Roman World*, ed. Margaret Atkins and Robin Osborne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 40-59, esp. 40-45. It should be noted, however, that Meggitt does at some points note the significance of differentiations among “the poor” (e.g., p. 5); furthermore, his strategy of stressing the material poverty of the mass of the empire’s population is understandable as an attempt to confront the frequent presumption in “new consensus” writing that some members of the churches were wealthy, elite, upper class, etc.

10. Friesen, “Poverty in Pauline Studies.”

11. Friesen, “Poverty in Pauline Studies,” p. 348.

12. There is, of course, mention of Peter, Silvanus, and Mark (1:1; 5:12-13), but even if these references allow any socioeconomic deductions to be drawn and are not part of what Francis Beare calls “the apparatus of pseudonymity” (Francis W. Beare, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 3rd ed. [Oxford: Blackwell, 1970 (first ed. 1947)], p. 48), they tell us nothing about the Christians to whom the letter was sent.

Christianity in Asia Minor. John Elliott describes it as “one of the most socially significant writings of the early church.”<sup>13</sup>

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 *οἶκος* (τοῦ θεοῦ). These terms, Elliott proposes, “are not merely linguistic but also sociological and theological correlates.”<sup>14</sup> 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.”<sup>15</sup>

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

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. xxxii. 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, 1993], 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 mission 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).

14. Elliott, *Home*, p. 23.

15. Elliott, *Home*, p. 24.

16. Elliott, *Home*, p. 35.

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.”<sup>19</sup> Indeed, in summarizing the findings of his opening chapter, Elliott makes clear how fundamentally his conclusions as to the significance of the designation *πάροικοι καὶ παρεπίδημοι* shape his reflections on the social profile of the addressees:

In 1 Peter the terms *paroikia*, *paroikoi* and *parepidēmoi* 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* (*parepidēmoi*) 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 *parepidēmoi* 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.<sup>20</sup>

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.”<sup>21</sup>

“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.”

19. Elliott, *Home*, p. 37; cf. p. 129.

20. Elliott, *Home*, p. 48.

21. Elliott, *Home*, pp. 62-63. Note, however, that this conclusion is both reiterated and qualified in what follows: most *πάροικοι* 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 *οἰκέται* (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.<sup>22</sup> And the conclusion that the addressees were *πάροικοι* 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.”<sup>23</sup>

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.<sup>24</sup> Trade and industry remained mostly small-scale and rudimentary.<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup>

22. Elliott, *Home*, pp. 65-67; also pp. 45-46 with pp. 55-56 nn. 76-77.

23. See Elliott, *Home*, pp. 67-70, with quotations from p. 70.

24. Moses I. Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 2nd ed. (London: Penguin, 1985 [first ed. 1973]); on agriculture, p. 188; on cities, pp. 123-49, 191-96.

25. Cf. also Richard Duncan-Jones, *The Economy of the Roman Empire: Quantitative Studies*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982 [first ed. 1974]), pp. 1-2.

26. Note Kevin Greene’s assessment: “His overall framework has remained intact: gross disparities in wealth, the importance of political power and social status, and the limitations

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.”<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup>

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.<sup>29</sup> 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.”<sup>30</sup>

Nonetheless, there is good reason to try to press beyond the binary model — a few very rich, an undifferentiated mass of the poor — found in

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of 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 primitivist/modernist debate, see also Meggitt, *Paul*, pp. 41-73, who supports Finley’s “primitivist” picture.

27. Duncan-Jones, *Economy*, p. 1. See further pp. 1-2.

28. For all these points, see Robin Osborne, “Roman Poverty in Context,” in Atkins and Osborne, eds., *Poverty in the Roman World*, pp. 1-20, at p. 4. See further Geza Alföldy, *The Social History of Rome* (London and Sydney: Croom Helm, 1985), pp. 94-156; Ekkehard W. Stegemann and Wolfgang Stegemann, *The Jesus Movement: A Social History of Its First Century* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999), pp. 7-95. On life expectancy, see Richard Duncan-Jones, *Structure and Scale in the Roman Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 93-104.

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 1.23% 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.

both ancient (elite) depictions and in some modern scholarship.<sup>31</sup> There is insufficient evidence to allow precise, robust conclusions to be drawn about the percentage of people living at various levels of socioeconomic status, but, as Friesen has shown, estimates can be attempted. His chart is as follows:<sup>32</sup>

PS1	Imperial elites	0.04%
PS2	Regional elites	1.00%
PS3	Municipal elites	1.76%
PS4	Moderate surplus	7.00%?
PS5	Stable near subsistence	22.00%?
PS6	At subsistence	40.00%
PS7	Below subsistence	28.00%

It is notable that the figures are most speculative in categories 4 and 5, as Friesen indicates with question marks.<sup>33</sup> 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?<sup>34</sup>

However, a recent essay by Walter Scheidel specifically addresses this issue, arguing for a sizeable “middling group” comprising 20-25 percent of Roman society.<sup>35</sup> 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.

32. See Friesen, “Poverty in Pauline Studies,” p. 347.

33. See Friesen, “Poverty in Pauline Studies,” pp. 343-45. 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.

34. John M. G. Barclay, “Poverty in Pauline Studies: A Response to Steven Friesen,” *JSNT* 26 (2004): 363-66, at p. 365.

35. Scheidel, “Stratification,” p. 54.

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"<sup>36</sup> 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.<sup>37</sup> 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.<sup>38</sup> By deliberate policy and acts of foundation, new cities were established across the provinces of Asia Minor. After surveying the rele-

36. 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.

37. I regard the likely date-range for 1 Peter as approximately 75-95 CE. See David G. Horrell, *The Epistles of Peter and Jude* (London: Epworth, 1998), pp. 8-10. Elliott, *1 Peter*, pp. 134-38, and Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1996), pp. 43-50, for example, come to broadly similar conclusions (Elliott suggests 73-92 CE, Achtemeier 80-100 CE, probably in the early part of that range).

38. For a brief overview of the development of Roman involvement in Asia Minor, see Richard J. A. Talbert, *Atlas of Classical History* (London and New York: Routledge, 1985), p. 159. For detailed discussion, see T. R. S. Broughton, "Roman Asia Minor," in *An Economic Survey of Ancient Rome*, ed. Tenney Frank, vol. 4 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1938), pp. 499-916, esp. pp. 505-98; Stephen Mitchell, *Anatolia: Land, Men, and Gods in Asia Minor*, Volume I: *The Celts and the Impact of Roman Rule* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993); A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Foreign Policy in the East 168 B.C. to A.D. 1* (London: Duckworth, 1984).

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."<sup>39</sup> Moreover, in the period of the Roman Empire, the inscriptional evidence shows "unequivocally that the plateau was densely populated."<sup>40</sup> 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)<sup>41</sup> should lead us to be cautious about regarding 1 Peter as necessarily addressed to predominantly rural areas, a point to which we shall return.<sup>42</sup>

Another major impact of Roman rule was the development of Asia Minor's network of roads.<sup>43</sup> 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.<sup>44</sup> The cost of 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.<sup>45</sup>

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

39. Mitchell, *Anatolia I*, p. 98.

40. Mitchell, *Anatolia I*, p. 148.

41. Cf. Mitchell, *Anatolia I*, p. 80.

42. Cf. Elliott, *1 Peter*, p. 90: "The predominantly rural feature of the provinces other than Asia. . . ." Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), describes the area to which 1 Peter was addressed as "a remote and undeveloped region," "a vast geographical area with small cities few and far between" (p. 22), where "Greek or Latin was spoken only by administrative officials" (p. 20). This last assertion (repeated in a similar vein on p. 22) is certainly false, even though it is true that indigenous languages survived especially in rural areas, where knowledge of Greek was less developed; on this point, see nn. 71-72 below.

43. Mitchell, *Anatolia I*, pp. 124-36.

44. Mitchell, *Anatolia I*, pp. 125-26.

45. Mitchell, *Anatolia I*, pp. 126-27.

no doubt taking opportunity to make various demands, legitimate and illegitimate, of the local communities,<sup>46</sup> which had a duty “to feed, clothe, house, and even to provide armour and equipment for the armies.”<sup>47</sup> These obligations, Mitchell notes, “were a distinct economic burden.”<sup>48</sup> Indeed, much of the agricultural produce, especially grain, paid as tax in kind, was probably used to supply the needs of the military.<sup>49</sup>

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.<sup>50</sup> Many country dwellers were thus “effectively serfs, tied to the land with obligations to provide the landowner with labour and produce.”<sup>51</sup>

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.

46. See Mitchell, *Anatolia I*, pp. 118-24, 141.

47. Mitchell, *Anatolia I*, p. 134.

48. Mitchell, *Anatolia I*, p. 134.

49. Mitchell, *Anatolia I*, pp. 245-53.

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).

51. Mitchell, *Anatolia I*, p. 176. On serfdom in the ancient Greek and Roman worlds, see further G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World from the Archaic Age to the Arab Conquests* (London: Duckworth, 1981), pp. 135-36, 147-62.

### 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 παρεπίδημοι*, 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.<sup>52</sup>

More recently, Karen Jobes has presented a new variation of this proposal for a literal interpretation of the addressees’ identity as *πάροικοι καὶ παρεπίδημοι*.<sup>53</sup> 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.”<sup>54</sup> One possibility is that the first converts in Asia Minor had been Pentecost pilgrims who heard Peter’s preaching in Jerusalem (Acts 2:9-11).<sup>55</sup> 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.<sup>56</sup> This intriguing theory is, however, subject to many of the same objections brought against Elliott’s proposal, which Jobes does not adequately address,<sup>57</sup> and it suffers from major addi-

52. See, e.g., Reinhard Feldmeier, *Die Christen als Fremde*, WUNT 64 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992), esp. pp. 203-10; Steven R. Bechtler, *Following in His Steps: Suffering, Community, and Christology in 1 Peter*, SBLDS 162 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1998), pp. 70-82; Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, pp. 174-75; Torrey Seland, *Strangers in the Night: Philonic Perspectives on Christian Identity in 1 Peter*, Biblical Interpretation Series 76 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp. 39-78.

53. Jobes, *1 Peter*, pp. 24-41.

54. Jobes, *1 Peter*, p. 26.

55. Jobes, *1 Peter*, pp. 27-28.

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 BCE and began earlier still);<sup>58</sup> (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 *titular* colonies, that is, the giving of a colonial title to an *existing* city as an honor.<sup>59</sup>

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.<sup>60</sup> As Mitchell notes, the rural population of Anatolia was often described as *πάροικοι*, *περίοικοι*, *κάτοικοι*, *κωμῆται*, or simply as the *λαός*.<sup>61</sup> As such, the description of the addressees as *πάροικοι* might still allow a significant deduction to be made about their social, political, and economic status. Yet there are also telling difficulties 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 *παρ-*

too imprecisely, to validate Elliott's hypothesis" (Jobes, 1 Peter, p. 31). See below for much more specific and decisive objections, which equally affect Jobes's theory.

58. For a survey of this evidence see Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C.–A.D. 135)*, vol. 3.1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), pp. 17–38; Mitchell, *Anatolia II*, pp. 31–37, and, for an extensive study of the Jewish communities of Asia Minor, Paul R. Trebilco, *Jewish Communities in Asia Minor*, SNTSMS 69 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

59. See further E. T. Salmon, *Roman Colonization under the Republic* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969), esp. chap. 10. According to Salmon's list (see p. 160), only three colonies were founded in Asia Minor during the reign of Claudius. Jobes's appeal to the work of David Noy, *Foreigners at Rome: Citizens and Strangers* (London: Duckworth, 2002), and Salmon, *Roman Colonization*, to support her proposals, seems, so far as I can see, entirely misplaced.

60. Bechtler, *Following*, pp. 71–73. Cf. also Elliott, 1 Peter, pp. 477–78, where the evidence cited indicates that the term *πάροικοι* stands in distinction to citizens. Elliott recognizes that the term can thus include natives of the locality, such as tenant farmers, but arguably does not take this sufficiently into account.

61. Mitchell, *Anatolia I*, p. 176; see pp. 176–78; Broughton, "Roman Asia Minor," pp. 629–40; cf. Ste. Croix, *Class Struggle*, p. 160, on *πάροικοι* in Greek texts as those without political rights.

*ἐπίδημοι* (1:1), while in 1:17 they are said to live out a *παροικία*, and in 2:11 are exhorted *ὡς παροίκους καὶ παρεπίδημους*. The noun *παρεπίδημος* is rare in Greek literature and occurs only twice in the LXX (Gen 23:4; Ps 38:13).<sup>62</sup> Its pairing with *πάροικος* in 2:11 suggests that the words function in 1 Peter as a *hendiadys*, both equally appropriate to describe the addressees, 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 *παρεπίδημος*). More crucially still, the use of *παρεπίδημος*, and the phrase pairing *πάροικος* with *παρεπίδημος*, 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 "a stranger and an alien" (*πάροικος καὶ παρεπίδημος*).<sup>63</sup> 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.<sup>64</sup> Perhaps the clearest example is in 1 Chron 29:15: *πάροικοί ἐσμεν 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).<sup>65</sup> 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.<sup>66</sup> 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.<sup>67</sup> As such, *pace*

62. See esp. Feldmeier, *Fremde*, pp. 8–12, who notes: "Der . . . Begriff *παρεπίδημος* begegnet sowohl im biblisch-jüdischen wie im paganen Schriftum ausgesprochen selten" (p. 8).

63. Cited also by Philo, *Conf.* 79.

64. *Pace* Elliott, *Home*, pp. 27–29. See further Feldmeier, *Fremde*, pp. 39–54, 207–8; Reinhard Feldmeier, "The 'Nation' of Strangers: Social Contempt and Its Theological Interpretations in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity," in *Ethnicity and the Bible*, ed. Mark G. Brett (Leiden: Brill, 1996), pp. 240–70, esp. 244–47, on "self-description as strangers before God" in the post-exilic situation.

65. Cf. also Lev 25:23 (*πάροικοι . . . ἐναντίον μου*); Ps 39:12 [38:13 LXX] (*πάροικος ἐγὼ εἰμι παρὰ σοὶ καὶ παρεπίδημος*).

66. Cf. Elliott, *Home*, pp. 42–43: "the fundamental contrast in 1 Peter is not a cosmological but a sociological one: the Christian community set apart from and in tension with its social neighbours"; Elliott, 1 Peter, p. 481: "a condition of *social*, not cosmological, estrangement."

67. See the central arguments of Feldmeier, *Fremde*, and Feldmeier, "The 'Nation' of Strangers."

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)<sup>68</sup> — 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.<sup>69</sup> 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,<sup>70</sup> 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.<sup>71</sup> It is also in the rural areas that indigenous languages persisted most strongly.<sup>72</sup> Questions remain about the precise quality of the Greek of 1 Pe-

ter,<sup>73</sup> 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 vicos 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.<sup>74</sup>

### 3.2 Socioeconomic Status

Elliott's interpretation of the addressees of 1 Peter as *πάροικοι* and *παρ-επίδημοι* 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.”<sup>75</sup> If Elliott's interpretation of the terms *πάροικος* and *παρ-επίδημος* 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.

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.” 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.

75. Elliott, *Home*, p. 70.

68. Elliott, *Home*, p. 63.

69. Bechtler, *Following*, p. 67.

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.



It is significant that the first group the writer addresses specifically in this table of ethical instruction is the οἰκέται. This designation, as opposed to the more generic and common δούλοι, suggests that these are *domestic* slaves, used in the household rather than in agricultural or industrial activity.<sup>76</sup> 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 οἰκέται were used.<sup>77</sup> 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.<sup>78</sup> 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."<sup>79</sup> 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.<sup>80</sup> 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."<sup>81</sup> 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."<sup>82</sup> All this implies that, despite the inevitable risk of overgeneralizing, we should place the οἰκέται in PS6, that is, "at subsistence level," with the possibility that some might slip into PS7, especially during times when food was particularly scarce.

76. Cf. Broughton, "Roman Asia Minor," p. 840; Ceslas Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), vol. 1, p. 384; *OCD*, p. 1415; Philo, *Spec. Leg.* 1.127.

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 οἰκέτης 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.

81. Dio, *Rom. Hist.* 55.26.1; Bradley, *Slavery and Society*, p. 100.

82. Bradley, *Slavery and Society*, p. 101.

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,"<sup>83</sup> such that there is no corresponding group of owners/masters within the churches addressed.<sup>84</sup> 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.<sup>85</sup> 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.<sup>86</sup> 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 (ἀνευ λόγου; 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.<sup>87</sup> 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 with believing husbands, as the example of Sarah and Abraham suggests.<sup>88</sup>

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 3:1-12; Titus 1:5-7). 1 Tim 3:12 indicates that these households included more than just wife and children. Other NT texts containing household codes do, of course, offer reciprocal instruction to slaves and masters (Col 3:22-4:1; Eph 6:5-9).

86. See Plutarch *Mor.* 140D; David L. Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive: The Domestic Code in 1 Peter*, SBLMS 26 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1981); Elliott, *1 Peter*, pp. 557-58.

87. Beare, *First Epistle of Peter*, p. 153, commenting on εἰ τις κτλ, 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' (*kai ei*) 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 (κόσμος) — not the external adornment of braided hair, gold, and clothing, but the inner adornment of a gentle and quiet spirit (3:3-4) — picks up a topos common in Jewish, Greek, and Roman moral exhortation. Plutarch expresses the point in a very similar way: “‘Adornment’ [κόσμος], said Crates, ‘is what adorns’; and what adorns a woman is what makes her better ordered [κοσμιώτερον] — not gold, nor emerald nor scarlet, but whatever gives an impression of dignity [σεμνότης], discipline [εὐταξία], and modesty [αἰδώς].”<sup>89</sup> 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.”<sup>90</sup>

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).<sup>91</sup> 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.<sup>92</sup>

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 Achtemeier 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).

89. *Mor.* 141E (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, Interpretive 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 3:16-4:1; *T. Reub.* 5.1-6; Philo, *Sac.* 21; *Virt.* 39-40.

90. Elliott, *1 Peter*, p. 565; and see nn. 175-76.

91. Bruce W. Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows: The Appearance of New Women and the Pauline Communities* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

92. Winter, *Roman Wives*, p. 8.

wives addressed.”<sup>93</sup> Others, however, take a different view. Francis Beare comments on 3:3:

It is implied that the Christian communities included among their members women of wealth and position. Slave girls and women of the poor might indeed try to make themselves attractive by putting up their hair in braids and by giving some attention to their dress, but they would hardly need the warning against flaunting gold jewellery. Even the ἐμπλοκῆς τριχῶν — “the braiding of hair” — suggests the services of the hairdresser, and the ἐνδύσεως ἱματίων — literally “the putting on of garments” — clearly implies sumptuousness, and perhaps even such elaborate dressing as would require the help of maids.<sup>94</sup>

Beare is probably guilty of reading too much from the text here, just as interpreters influenced later by the so-called “new consensus” have often taken restricted hints in the texts to imply considerable wealth and social position and have rightly been criticized for this.<sup>95</sup> Nonetheless, that the pattern of instruction is an established topos does not mean we should entirely dismiss its socioeconomic relevance. The wives addressed by the author of 1 Peter are instructed not to adorn themselves in this ostentatious way (ὧν ἔστω οὐχ . . .) and are given positive role models of submission and obedience from the Jewish scriptural tradition, the most relevant source of authoritative guidance for the author (3:5-6). This does seem to imply that behaving in such ways is a realistic temptation for the wives in view. A more cautious conclusion, then, is that of Jobes, who comments that “at least some” of those addressed “actually have enough wealth to make this instruction

93. Elliott, *1 Peter*, p. 564.

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

95. E.g., because Gaius 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 Anthony Thiselton's recent comments on Chloe: on the basis solely of the reference to οἱ Χλόης (1 Cor 1:11) 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. Thiselton, *First Corinthians: A Shorter Exegetical and Pastoral Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006], pp. 6-7; cf. Thiselton, *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.”<sup>96</sup> 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 (PS1-3), 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 (PS5-7), with some surplus resources at least at times.<sup>97</sup> That would suggest PS4.

The instruction to Christian husbands (3:7) — whether their wives are assumed to be Christian or not<sup>98</sup> — 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 some at least, probably PS4. There may be a little more information, though still only minimal data, in the later reference to πρεσβύτεροι (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.<sup>99</sup> 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; 57:1-2; Tit 2:2-4), and, on the other hand, why the terms πρεσβύτερος and ἐπίσκοπος (here ἐπίσκοπέω)<sup>100</sup> 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. 87-88).

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.

99. R. Alastair Campbell, *The Elders: Seniority within Earliest Christianity*, Studies of the New Testament and Its World (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), with summary on pp. 236-51; followed, for example, by Elliott, 1 Peter, pp. 813-15; Jobes, 1 Peter, pp. 302-3.

100. ἐπίσκοποῦντες should probably be accepted here, though it is omitted in  $\aleph^*$  and B. It is supported by P<sup>72</sup>,  $\aleph^2$ , A,  $\Psi$ , 33, 69, 1739. 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. b.

changeable.<sup>101</sup> 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.”<sup>102</sup> The πρεσβύτεροι 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.<sup>103</sup> 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 PS4. Nothing requires or implies that such senior figures, even if they be heads of households, have wealth or high social status.<sup>104</sup> (Similarly, while the vocabulary of “doing good” [cf. 2:12, 14-15; 3:16-17; 4:19; etc.] could be used to describe the euergetism 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.<sup>105</sup>) If some of their households

101. Cf. 1 Clem. 42:4-5; 44:4-5; Titus 1:5-7. Notably parallel to the use of πρεσβύτερος, ποιμαίνω, and ἐπισκοπέω in 1 Pet 5:1-2 is Acts 20:17, 28, where the same three roots are used to describe the position and calling of the Ephesian church leaders.

102. Elliott, 1 Peter, p. 840; see pp. 836-40 for the weighing of various scholarly proposals.

103. Cf. David G. Horrell, “Leadership Patterns and the Development of Ideology in Early Christianity,” in *Social-Scientific Approaches to New Testament Interpretation*, ed. Horrell (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), pp. 309-37, at p. 330. Such a pattern of instruction is especially clear in the Pastoral Epistles, where the ἐπίσκοποι, πρεσβύτεροι, and διάκονοι, as leaders of the churches, have responsibilities for respectable citizenship and good household management (1 Tim 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9).

104. Among the instructions given to them is a warning to fulfill their responsibilities μηδὲ ἀσχροκερδῶς (5:2). Although this adverb appears only here in the NT and LXX, related words and similar warnings are found elsewhere, notably in the Pastorals’ instructions to church leaders (see 1 Tim 3:3, 8; 6:10; 2 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:7, 11; also Heb 13:5; *Did.* 3.5; 15.1; 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 (*kerdainō*) of wealth for oneself was highly shameful (*aischros*)” (p. 829, with refs. 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; *Did.* 11-13). But I do not think the warning in itself says anything significant about the socioeconomic level of the πρεσβύτεροι here.

105. Pace Bruce W. Winter, *Seek the Welfare of the City: Christians as Benefactors and*

include οικήται, 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.<sup>106</sup> 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 παρεπίδημοι 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 παρεπίδημος, 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 παρεπίδημοι, 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,<sup>107</sup> 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

*Citizens, First-Century Christians in the Graeco-Roman World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), pp. 25-40, esp. pp. 26, 33, 37, 39.

106. It is also reasonable, therefore, to note that the addressees include both free persons and slaves (Elliott, *1 Peter*, p. 95). Whether it is right to take 2:13-17 as "specific instruction" for "free persons," as Elliott does, on the basis of 2:16 (ὡς ἐλεύθεροι), is more open to question, since the depiction of the addressees as "free" here might express a theological conviction more than a sociological description, as in 1 Cor 7:22.

107. Elliott, *1 Peter*, p. 90.

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 aetatis, omnis ordinis, utriusque 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.<sup>108</sup> 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.<sup>109</sup> 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-

108. 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."

109. 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 οικήται 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,<sup>110</sup> 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.<sup>111</sup> Elliott’s depiction of 1 Peter as a distinctive product “of a Petrine tradition transmitted by Petrine tradents of a Petrine circle,”<sup>112</sup> 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.”<sup>113</sup>

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.<sup>114</sup> 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 previ-

ously 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.<sup>115</sup> 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.<sup>116</sup> 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-ethics 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.<sup>117</sup> 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.<sup>118</sup>

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

110. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, p. 73.

111. See further David G. Horrell, “The Product of a Petrine Circle? A Reassessment of the Origin and Character of 1 Peter,” *JSNT* 86 (2002): 29-60.

112. John H. Elliott, “The Rehabilitation of an Exegetical Step-Child: 1 Peter in Recent Research,” *JBL* 95 (1976): 243-54, at 248.

113. Cf. Elliott, “Rehabilitation,” p. 248; Elliott, *1 Peter*, p. 40.

114. See further David G. Horrell, “Between Conformity and Resistance: Beyond the Balch-Elliott Debate Towards a Postcolonial Reading of 1 Peter,” in *Reading 1 Peter with New Eyes: Methodological Reassessments of the Letter of First Peter*, ed. Robert L. Webb and Betsy Bauman-Martin, LNTS 364 (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2007), pp. 111-43, esp. 124-33.

115. 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).

116. 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 Pastorals: see Horrell, *Social Ethos*.

117. Horrell, “Between Conformity and Resistance,” p. 143.

118. 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 Auditu* 10 (1994): 15-30.

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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.<sup>119</sup>

## EARLY CHRISTIAN RECEPTION

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