Part One: Associations in Roman Asia

1. Associations and Guilds: Varieties of Social Makeup

   **Overview:** While it is common to categorize associations according to their main purpose (religious, funerary, or otherwise), it is more useful to examine features (household, ethnic, neighborhood, occupational, and cult connections) with an analogical method. Associations were not socially homogenous groups as they are commonly represented. This is important to the social makeup of early Christianity.

   **Social Stratification in Greco-Roman Society**

   - The official social structure was a “steep pyramid” with four main levels (about 10% at the top): senatorial, equestrian, decurion, and plebian.
     - The “imperial elites” were 1% of the population.
       - Emperor
       - Senatorial aristocracy was comprised of a “few families.” 600 male members formed the senate. It was expected that each family would have 1 million sesterces. (Day laborer earned 1,000 sesterces a year.)
       - Equestrian rank was a hereditary status and demanded property of 400,000 sesterces. Patronage connections, especially with the emperor, were important.
     - Decurion city elite paralleled the patronage structures of the imperial elites. They were 10% or less of a city’s population.
     - The majority of the population (90%) were peasant farmers, since Roman society was agriculturally based.
     - Jean-Pierre Waltzing (1895-1900), E. Kornemann (1901), George La Piana (1921) believed that the majority of associations were socially homogenous. Wayne Meeks (1983) also generalized them as such.

   **Typology of Associations: A New Framework**

   - Most common scholarly view was a purpose-centered typology: 1) burial, 2) cultic (*collegia sodalicia*), and 3) burial (*collegia tenuiorum*).
     - Mommsen (1843) influenced Waltzing with “many private associations, originally founded in order to honor a divinity, ended up regarding religion as an accessory and the funeral as their principal aim.” Based on the point in belief that Roman authority strictly controlled associations and only burial escaped such rules.
     - Frank M. Ausbuttel (1982) and John Kloppenborg (1996a: 20-3) point out lack of evidence for existence of associations devoted solely to burial (*collegia tenuirum, funeraticia*) [p. 28]
       - Kloppenborg says it is more useful to categorize based on the profile of this membership: common household connection, shared occupation, and cult.
       - Social networks are emphasized in this approach.
Sociological studies since 1960s emphasize the importance of preexisting social networks for understanding the formation and growth of social and religious groups and movements.

- Five types of associations are important: household connections, ethnic or group connections, neighborhood relationships, occupation, and cult or temple.

  - **Household Connections**
    - In about 160 CE, an association of 400 initiates (*mystai*) in the mysteries of Dionysos (an exceptionally large group) honored Pompeia Agrippinilla.
      - Many of the main functionaries were from the families of Agrippinilla and Gallicanus (consul 150 CE, proconsul 165 CE).
      - The rest of the members were their dependents. Thus, heterogeneous membership could be formed because once the family associations were made, they could naturally expand.
    - Family networks and structures also were important in the formation and expansion of early Christian assemblies.
      - Organizational structures are illustrated in architecture. Local homes were adapted for community use, which led to leadership and organization of associations, synagogues, and congregations in the Greek East.
      - Language of family affection occurs in a significant number of associations that do not involve actual families (*contra* Meeks).
    - All female associations of initiates of Great Mother (Cybele) at Serdica in Thracia referred to leader as “mother.”
      - Jewish group at Stobi in Macedonia honored “father of synagogue” for donation. [p. 32]
      - Brother language attested in Egypt in athletic association.

  - **Ethnic or Geographic Connections**
    - Asia has many Romans who were from Rome or Italy. Membership was heterogeneous socioeconomically. [p. 33] Some immigrants could assume local citizenship, attain wealth, and become known as benefactors in city of residence (Hatzfeld 1919, Broughton 1938).
    - Judaeans grouped together as well—some had lived there for decades or centuries, so it is unwise to overemphasize “immigrant” status (cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 12.147-53).
      - Gentiles of varying levels of attachment could affiliate with a given synagogues (slaves of Jewish families, proselytes, and God-fearers).
      - Occupational and neighborhood networks influenced some Jews’ choice of synagogue affiliation. [p. 34]
    - Individual Jews could sometimes gain citizenship status (Applebaum 1974, Trebilco 1991 note complexities of determining this).
    - Several groups of Asia Minor emigrants were in Rome.
      - Sardinians met regularly at Rome (IGUR 85, 86, 87).
• Ephesian shippers and merchants met in Rome (I GR I 147).
• Phyrgians devoted to Great Mother in Pompeii and Rome (I GR I 458). [p. 35]
  • Asians who emigrated to Macedonia, Thrace, and Italy gathered in Dionysiac mysteries familiar to them at home (cf. Edson 1948, Nilsson 1957).
  • Contrary to scholarly traditions, extralocal links could play a significant role in some associations. [p. 36]
  o Neighborhood or Locational Connections
    • Street, district, or neighborhood dwellers could act together corporately, becoming an ongoing group with social and religious purposes. [p. 37]
  o Occupational Connections
    • Occupation was often interrelated with family ties: it was a common practice in antiquity for some to follow in their father’s footsteps, but professional affiliation also led to marriages like the goldsmith at Laodikeia Combusta who married the daughter of a head goldsmith. [p. 38]
    • While Celsus had his biases, Christians were often from the lower class. Workshops of wool workers, shoemakers, and clothes cleaners were integral for some Christian groups (Origen, Against Celsus 3.55). [p. 40]
    • Paul had his own handiwork (1 Thess 2:9, 4:9-12; 2 Thess 3:6-15).
    • Occupational associations were often more homogeneous in membership. [p. 41]
    • While the upper class’ disdain for work of any kind is evident from Herodotus (5th c. BCE) to Lucian (2nd c. CE), workers’ own understanding was different. Artisans often identified themselves by occupation on their gravestones. [p. 42]
    • Certain occupations might be more conducive to wealth-building than others.
      • Shippers and traders would have greater prestige than local tanners whose work involved undesirable odors and clothing cleaners whose labor by nature involved burning of sulfur and urine (cf. Lucian, Navigation; Philostratus, Life of Apollonius 4.32; D’Arms 1981).
      • Purple-dyers would have more wealth than regular clothiers, though any level of production could include ex-slaves (cf. Pleket 1983: 139-40; New Docs 113).
      • In cities like Ephesus, silversmiths or goldsmiths could do well. One silversmith was on Artemis sanctuary’s board of management.
      • Physicians could acquire wealth. [p. 42]
Some occupational guilds could have had women in their ranks. Lydia the purple-dye from Thyatira (Acts 16:11-5) and Elpis the purple-dealer at Kos, alongside a fellow worker, could be candidates. 2 women at Athens in 4th c BCE joined fellow clothing workers in dedicating monument to nymphs and all the gods.

Ephesus fisherman and fish dealers show diversity in size of donation to building fishery tell office. Also some were citizens, others were not, others were slaves. Thus, it was possible for heterogeneity in wealth among members, even in occupational associations.

○ Cult or Temple Connections
  ● Honoring gods and goddesses was important to all associations but some had this concern as their raison d’etre.
  ● Array of associations in Asia during the Roman era: Apollo, Aphrodite, Artemis, Asklepios, Cybele and Attis, Zeus, emperors (Sebastoi), as well as messengers of the gods (“angels”) or heroes. [p 44]
    • Men (Phrygian moon): primarily free or peasants from occupations, solely male or mixed
    • Sabazios (Phrygian, sometimes associated with Dionysios): men predominate, lesser economic means might be indicated by the poorer quality writing on their inscriptions.
    • Initiates (mystai) in mysteries were honoring the gods in one of the most respected ways. “Mysteries” covered a variety of practices: sacrifice, communal meals, reenactment of myths of gods, sacred processions, and hymns.
    • Egyptian Isis and Serapis were well-attested. Apuleius’ famous description of a procession in honor of Isis suggests the importance of women (Metamorphoses, bk 11)
    • Sharon Kelly Heyob (1975) points out that only 18.2% (200 of 1,099 inscriptions) mention women as priestess, member, or devotee.
    • Eleusinian Demeter and Kore were especially evident at Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamum. [p. 45]
    • Dionysos is the best attested. The foundation myth of maenads in 3rd c. BCE legitimated by oracle at Delphi is found in a 2nd c. CE inscription at Magnesia by Maeander River. It remained important in the Roman era, even though groups were mixed (men and women).
      ○ A group in Smyrna had purity regulations, showing influence by Orphic dietary practice. [p. 47]
      ○ Cowherds at Pergamum were primarily men and about 35% of them were Roman citizens.
      ○ Epitaphs from Asia Minor and from Italy indicate that children could lead dances and speak rites, corresponding to the prominence of childhood in Dionysiac myths. [p. 48]
  ● Diversity is also found in Jewish associations.
• “Most High” associations in cities of the Bosporous have been shown to be related to Gentile worship of the Jewish God. The leader was called a synagogos.
• 4th c Church Fathers (Epiphanius, Gregory of Nazianzus) complained about proseuchai that were comprised of neither Christians nor ethnic Jews.
• Christian congregations were devoted to the Jewish god. [p. 50]
  • In the 1980s, scholars began to move away from the notion that Christianity was solely a lower class movement.
  • Pliny the Younger had “individuals of every age and class, both men and women” brought before him as Christians (Epistles 10.96.4.8-9).
  • Inclusion of household codes giving advice to both men and women suggests the presence of both groups (1 Peter, Pastoral Epistles, Ignatius’ epistles).
  • Pastoral Epistles, Johannine epistles, and Ignatius’ epistles mention wealthier figures who assumed leadership of congregations. [p. 51]
  • While the Christians in Smyrna appear to have drawn a greater proportion of membership from lower classes, those in Laodicea had considerable wealth. [p. 52]

**Conclusion:** Many unofficial associations had membership from heterogeneous nonelite groups. Five types of composition are useful in examining the membership of these unofficial associations. While this study has focused on Roman Asia, other studies have come to similar conclusions for other areas in the Roman Empire. [p. 53]

2. Internal Activities and Purposes: Honoring the Gods, Feasting with Friends

**Overview:** The imperial dimensions of group life did not stand in isolation nor were they the only important feature. The general functions of associations are shared by Jewish and Christian groups, making them part of this category despite the peculiarity of their monotheism. [p. 53-4]

**Visualizing Association Life**
• Monuments in Mysia depict actual activities of the associations. The gods Zeus, Artemis, and Apollo hold the customary libation bowl in their right hands, while the six members of associations on a smaller scale recline to share in the banquet.
• Sacrificial offerings for the gods and other forms of worship were also important. [p. 57]

**Questioning a Scholarly Tradition**
• One stream of scholarship (M.P. Nilsson, Ramsay McMullen, Nicholas R.E. Fisher) separates the social from the religious. [p. 59]
  o Nilsson saw the associations as using the god as a pretext for feasting, finding the mysteries “pseudo-mysteries.” [p. 59]
  o MacMullen emphasizes the feasting and friendship associations over against the cosmological significance of the feast itself.
Fisher finds the main purpose of *collegia* to be “status, solidarity, sociability, and other aspects of social security” (1988b: 1222-3). [p. 60]

- Harland’s working definition: “‘religion’ or piety in antiquity had to do with appropriately honoring gods and goddesses (through rituals of various kinds, especially sacrificial offerings) in ways that ensured the safety and protection of human communities (or groups) and their members.”

**Intertwined Social, Religious, and Funerary Dimensions of Association Life**

- **Religious Activities** [p. 61]
  - Inscriptions are limited in the information they provide because they take for granted customary practice (which is precisely what scholars want to know).
  - Dream books of Artemidorus Daldis (in 2nd c. CE Ephesus) provides evidence that those in a common occupation often devoted themselves to a particular deity. [p. 62]
  - Silversmiths of Acts 19:23-41 would simply be protecting the landscape of their dream and waking life and would not be exceptional.
    - Building remains of guild halls in Italy have sanctuaries and feasting facilities, showing the interrelation of social and religious activities within guild life. [p.63]
    - Ethnic based guild on Greek island of Delos illustrates the importance of cultic functions; its concern to honor other deities is shown by inclusion of their statues. [p. 65-6]
    - Teira (near Ephesus) epitaph makes a provision for guild workers to hold a yearly wine banquet. [p. 69]
    - Inscription of Ephesus *synedrion* of physicians refers to the guild as “physicians who sacrifice to ancestor Asklepios and the *Sebastoi*” (*I Eph* 719). [p. 69]
  - Religious festivals and gatherings to honor the gods were a common feature of group life; they could include a number of different rituals and practices, including mysteries. Walter Burkert’s (1987) study rightly emphasizes that mysteries did not exist over against other religious life. [p. 70]
  - Individuals and groups took honoring the god appropriately very seriously.
    - One of the “confession inscriptions” (*Beichtinschriften*) of Asia Minor says the man from Blaudos (east of Philadelphia) is punished by the god “because he did not want to come and take part in the mystery when he was called” (*MAMA* IV 281 = Petzl 1994: 126 no. 108; 1st-2nd c. C.E., from Dionysopolis).
    - Rare instances of exclusivism did occur, as when *therapeutai* of Zeus at Sardis were “not to participate in the mysteries of Sabazios… and of Agdistis and Ma” (*ISardH* 4 = *NewDocs* I 3; 2nd c. C.E.). [p. 71]
  - Singing and music could be important in associations, congregations, and synagogues.
    - Organizations of boys, girls, or youths who regularly sang commonly appeared in civic cults and festivals.
    - Orphic hymns, probably from western Asia Minor (Pergamum), refer to Dionysiac initiates and singing cowherds.
Pliny states that the Christians “met regularly before dawn on a fixed day to chant verses alternately amongst themselves in honor of Christ as if to a god” *(Epistles* 10.96.7 LCL).

Philo gives a similar picture of Jewish *therapeutai* in Egypt of the importance of singing and dance (with prayer, meals, and other activities). [p. 72]

- **Social and Feasting Activities**
  - Feasting is often mentioned in respect to associations, but we should not accept the accounts of Jewish and Christian apologists like Philo and Tertullian wholesale.
  - Upper-class novelists often used the shock value of secretive, nocturnal, and wild banquets involving drunkenness at best and extreme rituals (incestuous sex, ritual murder, cannibalism) at worst. [p. 74]
    - Henrich (1970, 1972) believes Lollianos’ novel (depicting an association practicing ritual infanticide, a cannibalistic communal meal, and promiscuous sexual activity) is inspired from personal knowledge of dark rituals.
    - Jack Winkler (1980) believes Lollianos is inverting the norms for escapist entertainment.
    - Livy’s Augustan era description of Dionysiac groups could correspond with novelistic stereotypes and upper-class pretensions than what happened in 186 B.C.E.
  - There was a set of socioreligious expectations to maintain order at meetings and banquets, although the perception might occasionally be otherwise (1 Cor. 11:17-34).
    - Regulations of Zeus Hypsistos in Egypt and Iobacchoi in Athens listed rules and punishments. [p. 75]
    - Dreams occasionally reflect member’s sense of having transgressed. [p. 76]
  - Some groups like Dionysiacs held food and drink to be an essential element in worship of the deity. [p. 77]
    - Excavations of the meeting hall of Dionysiac cowherds at Pergamum found that members of the association (up to 70 persons) reclined on the benches with their feet to the wall and their heads toward the center where the altar was. Bone remnants of beef, swine, and poultry were found. [p. 78] A painting with Dionysiac connections was still visible on the western wall of the cult niche. [p. 79]

- **Funerary Activities**
  - Connections between socioreligious functions of associations and funerary ones were sometimes direct.
    - Common practice included holding funerary feasts or wine banquets for deceased members, including customary burial rituals.
    - Associations and Christian congregations could provide burial fees for poor members. Burial coverage varied on the economic makeup of the association (poorer association to Diana and Antinoos refused burial fees to people dying more than 20 miles away and suicides. [p. 84]
whereas wealthier Athens Iobacchoi merely restrict wine at the banquet to those who have not first attended the funeral).

- Some associations had a collective cemetery or tomb.
- Associations of various kinds received benefactions based on taking care of a grave for or marking anniversaries of a wealthy member.
- Associations received fines for violation.  [p. 85]

**Conclusion:** Through rituals, worship of gods, and funerary provisions, associations could offer members a sense of belonging and identity (contrast Burkert 1987). [p. 86]

3. Associations in Civic Context: Symptoms of Decline or Participants in Vitality?

- **Assessing Scholarly Theories: Associations as Symptoms of Decline?**
  - Characterizing associations as a symptom of the decline of Roman civilization has been common in an important tradition in scholarship from the late nineteenth century to today.
    - The vitality of Greek religion was seen to have been tied to the Greek polis. Although individuals continued to participate in the outward celebrations, they were no longer affected internally by them (Murray 1935; Nilsson 1964).
    - “Private” or “personal” religion was a replacement for the increasingly artificial “public” religion, in this view (Dodds 1959).
    - Recent scholarship like that of J.K. Davies still maintains that associations opposed city-based religion and society.
  - There are “several difficulties with approaches that see associations as compensatory phenomena in a period of civic decline:”
      - Autonomy was greater in actuality and not necessary in theory. Hansen finds that “a city-state did not lose its identity as a polis by being subjected to another city-state or, for example, to the king of Persia, or Macedon, or a Hellenistic ruler, or Rome” (Hansen 1993:19). Contrary to some scholars, Roman authorities interfered in the affairs of cities mostly when there was a public disorder that could not be handled or when requested from below.
      - The depiction of a degeneration from classical democracy is flawed: the assembly of the people still had an active, major role in the legislative and judicial aspects of government in the polis in Hellenistic and Roman eras, despite the influence of the wealthy on the *boule*. [p. 93]
  - Recent scholarship has emphasized that Greek religion thrived until at least the 3rd c. C.E.
    - Robert Parker’s *Athenian Religion* (1996) shows the false dichotomy between classical religion and Hellenistic religion and the misleading “public” versus “private” distinction. [p. 94]
The imposition of “modern” concepts is inappropriate in studying the ancient world, including “private religion,” “individualism,” and the corresponding sense of anomie. [p. 95]

Associations did provide things members could not get elsewhere, but we should not equate participation in associations with an economic, religious, or social deficiency. [p. 96]

**The Civic Framework and Social Networks of Benefaction**
- There were significant continuities from classical to Roman period: boule and demos in Asia Minor cities on Greek model, theaters, baths, marketplaces, and stadia.
- Most important development was the rise of benefaction in social networks.
  - Honor and shame remained a feature of Mediterranean values, including those of Jews and Christians (cf. Malina 1981).
  - Relations in benefaction were reciprocal: both benefactor and beneficiary were perceived to have gained something (not necessarily tangible) from the exchange. [p. 97]
  - The Greek East held the relationship between the emperor and the polis to be equal to the one between the gods and the polis in the case of “rulers whose beneficence and insurance of stability was comparable to the gods” (cf. Aristides, *Orations*, 19.5; Artemidorus, *Dream Interpretations* 3.13; Dio, *Orations* 32.26). [p.98]
  - Gods, emperors, and imperial officials in the province were contacts to maintain for local aristocracy, polis institutions, and other groups.
  - Wealthy individuals were expected to provide benefaction in the form of financial contributions for buildings, festivals, statues, and other structures dedicated to polis, god, and emperor and in the form of banquets and food distribution in famine.
  - Beneficiaries reciprocate by erecting an inscription or monument or by praise (e.g., Petronius’ comment that he applauded the spectacle and has therefore repaid his debt to the giver of the spectacle).

- Motivations for benefactions are many.
  - There was genuine civic pride. [p. 99]
  - Honor was highly valued in an honor-and-shame culture. Failure to seek honor would lead to shame… or an angry mob of poor people seeking vengeance against a wealthy city councilmember.
  - There was a desire to gain immortality of sorts on the part of the donors through remembrance of benefactions.
  - Competition for preeminence among wealthy families was matched by potential benefactors. [p. 100]
  - Cooperation in an association was the best way for individuals with common interests to gain the attention of an imperial or civic official.

**Associations as Participants in Civic Vitality**
- Primary evidence of these associations does not support the theories of decline; these groups represent the less privileged strata of society scholars of the decline theories see as disenfranchised from civic participation.
- Participation in Political Life [p. 101]
- Notions of citizenship became less restricted in the Roman era; a polis conferred citizenship as a way of honoring outsiders (athletes, the wealthy who could be citizens of multiple cities).
- While ethnic- or geographic-based associations did offer their members what was not completely accessible to them within the polis, wealthy immigrants were offered citizenship. We do not know if nonelite members were offered citizenship. [p. 102]
- The address by Dio Chrysostom of the exclusion of certain artisans from political life in Tarsus implies that it was not normal practice to exclude such socioeconomic groups from political participation in the city. Native and freeborn artisans normally possessed citizenship and participated in Asian assemblies. [p. 104]
- The Ephesus assembly started by silversmiths in Acts 19:23-41 and a second-century proconsular edict about disturbances caused by Ephesian bakers indicates the importance of guilds within civic life. [p. 105]

**Participation in Social Networks of Benefaction**
- Civic identification could be shown through benefactions to the polis or homeland by guilds from even lower class strata like artisans. [p. 106]
- Occupational and other groups joined political institutions in honoring benefactors.

**Participation in Social and Cultural Life**
- Attachment to civic institutions is evidenced by marketplaces, baths, gymnasia, stadia, and theaters. [p. 108]
- Ordinary associations had bench and latrine reservations in stadia and bath-gymnasiums. [p. 109]

*Conclusion:* Associations were participants in civic vitality and not decline.

**Part Two: Imperial Cults and Connections among Associations**

4. **Imperial Gods within Religious Life: Cultic Honors**
   - **The Case of Demeter Worshipers at Ephesus**
     - Imperial cult connections are associated with the priesthoods of the honorees.
     - That religious rites were an important is shown from an inscription from the time of Domitian.
     - These gods were incorporated into her ritual life and mysteries. [p 119]
   - **Questioning a Scholarly Tradition**
     - A.D. Nock’s response to the Demetriasts was that the Emperor or Empress was unlikely to have identified with the Demeter figures in the mysteries. Poland claims the cultic activities had little significance for an association’s “self-understanding.”
     - The central conviction is that imperial cults were not integrated with religious life of all other cultic forms; they were “political, not religious; public, not private.” [p. 119]
     - Although the public-private distinction smacks of an antiritualistic, individualistic modern definition of religion like William James or Rudolf
Otto, there is some evidence that imperial cults were important in “private” contexts. [p. 120]

- Recent scholarship by Price, Friesen, and Mitchell show the integration of imperial cults within cultic life in this region, with political, social, and religious significance for various social strata. R.R.R. Smith’s work on *Sebastoi* at Aphrodisias shows that the emperors were “added to the old gods, not as successors or replacements, but as a new branch of the Olympian pantheon” (1987: 136).

**Rituals for the Sebastoi within Associations**

- Republican and Augustan traditions waited until the senate had proclaimed a respected emperor a god after his death in the Latin West, but the Greek East granted such honors to living rulers. [p. 121]
- Provincial imperial cults and temples organized by institutions claimed to represent the civic communities of a given province. [p. 122]
- There were civic imperial cults that were devoted to honoring the *Sebastoi* and which maintained close connections with other institutions in the polis.
- Local shrines, monuments, and expressions of honor for the emperors as gods existed in unofficial settings (small groups, families, individuals).

**Official Settings** [p. 123]

- Organizations of gymnasia and professional associations of Dionysiac performers or athletes devoted to Herakles could participate in official civic or provincial celebrations.
- Some other, less official, associations that could also on occasion participate in provincial or civic imperial cult celebrations were *hymnodoi*, primarily comprised of wealthy members. [p. 124]

**Unofficial Group Settings**

- Some form of emperor worship was probably integrated into most guilds.

**Sacrifices**

- Recent studies show that sacrifice served to: 1) reinforce social relations and hierarchies, and 2) elicit protection and avoid punishment. [p. 126]
- Sacrifices were made to imperial deities in Demetriasts at Ephesus and other groups.
- Price is incorrect in his argument that sacrifices were made “on behalf of” and not “for” the emperors. [p. 127] Friesen adduces much evidence that is not cited by Price.
- It was customary for a ritual meal to follow the sacrifice, which could have influenced Christian practice.

**Mysteries** [p. 128]

- Participation in mysteries in a small-group setting could give a sense of belonging to the broader civic or imperial mysteries.
- Egyptian papyrological evidence shows connection between royal mysteries in Egypt and the Dionysiac mysteries. This continues through Cleopatra and Mark Antony.
- An Oxyrhynchus papyrus shows Demeter’s Eleusinian mysteries, which are attributed to Bithynia in Asia Minor, in the performance of mysteries to magnify “Caesar” in Egypt. [p. 129]
Monument for Hadrian at Pergamum shows that sacrificial cakes, incense, and lamps for the image of the \textit{Sebastoi} were involved in the mysteries for the birthday of Augustus. [p. 131]

\textbf{The Significance of Imperial Rituals within Associations}

- Mary Douglas points out antiritualist analysis comes from post-Reformation modern bias, whereas rituals have meaning and are associated with power relations in society.
- Clifford Geertz understands religion as a system of symbols or inherited conceptions, analogous to language, which communicates meanings. [p. 132]
- Geertz claims that ritual plays an important role in sustaining the interplay between social experience and worldview. [p. 133]

Price is right to rejected previous studies which focused on mental states of individuals in Greco-Roman religion and instead approaches the imperial rituals as a “way of conceptualizing the world.” The imperial cult “was a major part of the web of power that formed the fabric of society.” Now, attention needs to be given to the significance of rituals within small-group settings or associations. [p. 134]

Imperial gods were important to the self-understanding of many associations; their rituals unconsciously reflected many features of cultural life in the larger polis. [p. 135]

5. Positive Interaction: Imperial Connections and Monumental Honors
   \textbf{Social Network Analysis}
   - Since the mid-1950s, social scientists have used “social network” as an analytical tool to show the “interactional dimensions” of: content, directedness, durability, and intensity of social ties. [p. 139]

6. Tensions in Perspective: Civic Disturbances and Official Intervention
   - Associations were not generally anti-Roman or subversive groups. Roman officials intervened only occasionally in the broader context of civic disturbances. [p. 173]

Part Three: Synagogues and Congregations within Society

7. Comparing Socioreligious Groups in Antiquity
   \textbf{Associations and Early Christianity: Trajectories in Scholarship}
   - Georg Heinrici (1876, 1881) and Edwin Hatch (1909) independently proposed that associations (more than synagogues) should be considered as “historical analogies” to Christian congregations. [p. 178]
   - The majority of scholars responded to Heinrici and Hatch that synagogues rather than associations were the formative influence on Christianity.
   - E.A. Judge’s \textit{The Social Pattern of the Christian Groups in the First Century} (1960) revived Heinrici’s and Hatch’s proposals. [p. 179]
   - Malherbe echoed this in 1983.
   - Meeks and other scholars contend associations do not serve as models for comparison with Christian or Jewish groups because: Christian groups were more inclusive or heterogeneous in social composition, Christian groups used different terminology, Christian and Jewish groups were more exclusivistic or sectarian than associations.
     - Meeks oversimplifies social compositions of associations.
• Congregations and synagogues mirrored associations in their influence by household structures and benefaction. [p. 181]
• Meeks exaggerates the extralocal character of Christian assemblies and underestimates them for associations.

**The Portrayal of Christian and Jewish Groups as “Sects”** [p. 182]
  o Although many associations were not exclusivistic, some were.
  o There were many contacts between Jews and non-Jews in Sardis, Miletos, and Aphrodisias. [p. 183]
  o 1 Corinthians suggests some Christians were maintaining multiple affiliations other than just Christian assemblies.

**Sectarian Depictions of Groups Addressed by the Apocalypse** [p. 184]
  o The traditional view of the Apocalypse is that the author’s references to the death of Christians in the futuristic visions refer to current persecution under Domitian (81-96 C.E.). Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza is the latest proponent of this tradition.
  o The earliest direct reference to this persecution is given by Melito, bishop of Sardis (170-180 C.E.), and preserved in Eusebius. [p. 185]
  o In case of Christians in Pontus around 110 C.E., Pliny the Younger says that some said they ceased to be Christians two or more years previously and some even 20 years ago.
  o Aune correctly notes that all Melito says is that widely disliked Nero and Domitian held negative attitudes toward Christian teaching.
  o Supporters of the Domitian persecution point to a letter of the Roman Christians to Corinth in 90 C.E. speaks of “sudden and repeated misfortunes and calamities that have befallen us.” [p. 186] The authors use similar language to describe the main problem at Corinth, which is internal rebellion by youths against elders.
  o Contrary to previous belief, recent studies of Domitian’s principate suggest that portrayals of Domitian after his death and damnatio by friends of a new emperor are not accurate. [p. 187]
  o Thompson, Yarbro Collins, J. Wilson, and Aune all find a lack of evidence for any Roman-initiated, official persecution of Christian in Asia Minor in the first two centuries. Nero’s slaughter was an exceptional incident.
  o Persecution of Christians in the first two centuries in Asia Minor is better characterized as local and sporadic.
  o 1 Peter depicts Christians suffering through verbal abuse not martyrdom.
  o The Apocalypse was sectarian. [p. 189]

**Sectarian Depictions of Other Christian Groups in Asia**
  o Some scholars who acknowledge the lack of persecution still categorize Asian Christianity as “sectarian,” using Brian Wilson’s sociological typology.
  o Wilson’s sociological typology is corrupted by modern individualist notions: a sect to Wilson is a “deviant movement” that can be categorized into seven types based on soteriology and “response to the world.” [p. 190]

**Problems with Sectarian-Focused Approaches**
  o Scholars emphasizing the sectarian nature of Roman Asian Christianity have overemphasized exclusivity, separation, and tensions with “society.”
Malina (1978) and Schoedel (1980) suggest that Ignatius’ letters reveal a positive outlook about the place of Christians within civic life. [p. 192]

The Pastoral Letters reflect a concern for keeping up the appearances of Greco-Roman culture; the writer accepts the values of that culture. [p. 194]

**Assimilation and Acculturation**

- J. Milton Yinger defines assimilation as “a process of boundary reduction that can occur when members of two or more societies or of smaller cultural groups meet.” [p. 195]
- Scholars often delineate: 1) cultural assimilation (or acculturation) of language, dress, religion, and other cultural feature, and 2) structural assimilation where members become more evident and participatory in the formal political and socioeconomic institutions of society. Acculturation can progress significantly without disruption to the group’s perceived boundaries in relation to the larger society. [p. 197]
- Acculturation, assimilation, and dissimilation (rather than sectarian typologies) should be utilized for synagogue and congregation studies in the Greek East. [p. 199]

**A Revised View of Jewish Synagogues in the Diaspora**

- Until recently, scholarship saw Jewish communities in the diaspora as isolated within a hostile environment.
- Epigraphic evidence shows that being a Jew did not preclude polis participation; some synagogue’s practices resembled those of associations. [p. 201]
- The Glykon inscription and Jewish guild in Hierapolis illustrate the potential for multiple affiliations or even memberships in subgroups of local society. [p. 209]

**Conclusion**

- Jonathan Z. Smith (*Drudgery Divine*) traces the problems with genealogies in scholarship and their use to insulate Christianity from pagan environments as a unique religion. The analogical model should be used.
- In antiquity, Christian, Jewish, and Greco-Roman authors themselves compared the groups (Pliny the Younger, Lucian, Celsius, Philo, Tertullian). [p. 212]

8. Positive Interaction: Jews, Christians, and Imperial Honors in the Greek City

**Jewish Literature, Roman Imperialism, and Group Practice**

- The diversity of ancient Judaism led to a variety of viewpoints about the Romans and their empire.
  - Distinguishing rhetoric and reality is difficult because the “image of empire” that emerges is set by motifs and Scripture, thus telling us more about methods of biblical interpretation than actual events or perceptions.
  - 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch describe the destruction of the second temple (70 C.E.) in terms of the destruction of the first (586 B.C.E.). [p. 215]
• Jewish Sibylline Oracles rail against the economic exploitation by Rome of Asia. [p. 216]
• Much of this is defined by the genre of apocalypse and prophetic doom.
• Many of these writings were writing about a specific event yet placing it in cosmological time.
• Grabbe and others caution that an apocalyptic writing does not necessarily signal a millennial movement. [p. 217]

**Jewish Synagogues in Roman Asia**
- The traditional view of speaking of documents in Josephus as making Judaism a *religio licta* that implied there were other illegal religious groups and associations throughout the empire is inadequate. The privileges recorded by Josephus represent a response to petitions and complaints, as Rajak and Trebilco argue. [p. 222]
- Asian, Alexandrian, Roman, and Ostian synagogues all visibly demonstrated their respect for the empire. [p. 223]
- Julia Severa was not a Jew (Ramsay, Trebilco) but she was a benefactor for a synagogue; this linkage with a high priestess is matched by the head of the synagogue’s relation with the Tyrronius family (and even the possibility that he is not Jewish). [p. 229]

**Christian Assemblies in Asia Minor**
- Concrete material evidence of Christian group life in Roman Asia is wanting during this time. [p. 228]
- Christians were a numerically insignificant portion of the population.
- There is important literary evidence that Christian assemblies in Asia Minor could participate in certain imperial practices.
- Many Christian leaders in Asia held a relatively positive view of empire, including the author of the Pastoral, the author of 1 Peter, Polycarp, and Melito. [p. 229]
- The alternate view claimed to be found in the Acts of Paul is typical of the tendency to “read into Christian sources references to imperial cults or to exaggerate anti-Roman sentiments” as may be found in Dennis MacDonald, Allen Brent, and Richard Horsley.
- As Walaskay, Vernon Robbins, and Edwards have noted, Luke-Acts posits early Christianity’s valid place within the Roman Empire. [p. 236]
- Vernon K. Robbins is right to argue that Luke-Acts reflects “a narrative map grounded in ideology that supported Christians who were building alliances with local leaders throughout the eastern Roman empire” (1991: 202). [p. 237]

9. Tensions in Perspective: Imperial Cults, Persecution, and the Apocalypse of John

**How Significant Were Imperial Cults for Judaism and Christianity?**
- Scholars overstate the case for imperial cults’ oppressive importance for Judaism and Christianity (e.g., Smallwood). [p. 241]
  - Cultic honors for the emperors were not an imposed feature in Roman Asia. Most emperors and officials were not concerned that the living emperor was worshipped, and those wishing to keep to republican and Augustan traditions were worshipped more than they would have liked.
• Imperial cults in Roman Asia were not political phenomenon devoid of religious dimensions.
• Imperial cults were integrated within religious life. [p. 243]

- Persecution and Imperial Cults: Pliny, Hadrian, and Polycarp
  - Pliny the Younger’s Letter to Trajan
    • Although the reasons for the accusations of Christians in Pontus is not clearly stated, it seems that it is like the martyrdom of Polycarp where Christian failed to honor the god or to participate in religious life.
    • M.J. Edwards rightly argues that the rumors of Christians’ human sacrifice and cannibalism were an attempt to fill the void in expected behavior of sacrifices to gods and goddesses with novelistic stereotypes rather than to misunderstand the Lord’s Supper or to attribute Gnostic practices to orthodox Christians. [p. 245]
    • Pliny has no precedents to follow. His test is for adherence to the gods; the issue of political disloyalty is not addressed. Trajan has no interest in hunting down Christians.
  - Hadrian’s Letter to the Proconsul of Asia
    • As with Pliny, the case is brought by local inhabitants. [p. 247]
    • Granianus wrote Hadrian as Pliny wrote Trajan; Fundanus had replaced Granianus by the time the response was composed.
    • Hadrian’s concern is not with protecting Christians but proper legal procedure. There is nothing to suggest disloyalty to empire or imperial cults.
  - The Martyrdom of Polycarp
    • The temporary nature of persecution is noted when the senders note Polycarp “put an end to the persecution by his martyrdom as though adding the seal.” [p. 248]
    • The motivation for the accusations is that Christians did not honor the gods; imperial cult practices, albeit more prominent than in Pliny’s cases, are only a test by authorities. [p. 249]
    • “Evidently, failure to honor the gods set Jews and Christians apart in some respects from other inhabitants, including the members of other associations, even though they could be integrated in other respects.” [p. 250]
    • There were intermittent conflicts, nonetheless, and should not be overstated. [p. 251]

- New Perspectives on John’s Apocalypse
  - The Apocalypse has a different Christian stance toward empire, namely a negative one.
  - The Apocalypse has similarities to Jewish oracular and apocalyptic literature in religious, military, and economic aspects.
  - Chapter 13 concerns the interconnected religious and military pretensions of Rome; the Roman Empire and Christianity share a mutual hatred.
  - Chapters 17-18 condemn economic aspects of the Roman Empire. [p. 252]

- Rhetorical Situation and Strategy
The rhetorical situation may be explained when we ask who the general recipients of the Apocalypse were; many congregations drew membership from Jewish and Gentile backgrounds. [p. 253]

Thus John seeks to convince Christian assemblies (beyond the seven at the beginning) with a visionary framework to adopt a more radical perspective; they should avoid honoring imperial figures and separate from various aspects of civil life, contrary to normative practice within many associations, synagogues, and congregations. [p. 255]

John is worried that Christian practice of honoring the empire could be unconsciously following an evil system and buying into false imperial ideology.

**Imperial Cults: Rhetoric and Reality [p. 256]**

- John probably has Nero redivivus in mind when he speaks of the first beast.
- John could have been aware of the tests other Christians were facing when they were brought forward to trial.
- John was probably envisioning the destruction of Jerusalem like 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch rather in his depiction of the slaughter of the Christians. [p. 258]
- Despite these correspondences of rhetoric and reality, the Apocalypse is not and does not claim to be a reflection of historical circumstances.

**John’s Opponents in the Letters: Nicolaitans and Others**

- John accuses the Nicolaitans of eating idol food. Many scholars note the activities of these opponents probably including imperial activities. [p. 259]
- Some of the opponents were probably continuing their membership in occupational guilds; Rev 18’s condemnation of merchants, shippers, and craftsmen who “fornicate” with Rome is telling. [p. 261]
- The opponents probably viewed this as continuing in their everyday activities. [p. 263]