

BOOK REVIEW

Hanson, K.C., and Douglas E. Oakman, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus: Social Structures and Social Conflicts* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2nd edn, 2008). xxii + 231 pp. Pbk. \$32.00 USD.

This is the second edition of a volume that has now been in circulation for a decade. Its preface accurately describes it as ‘in many senses a congeries of models of the ancient world of Jesus of Nazareth. The book may be thought of as a metamodel of the social structures and social conflicts of that first-century period’ (p. xxi). From the outset, even the page layout of *Palestine in the Time of Jesus* is reminiscent of an introductory anthropology text, as it employs terms such as ‘agrarian society’, ‘ethnocentrism’, ‘Israelite’ and ‘Judean’. The authors state that they aimed to comprehend ‘the endless conflict within Jesus’ environs that never led to any significant social change...[For] not until the modern commercial, industrial, and communications revolutions were values and social forces set in motion to produce the revolutionary social changes associated with democracy and capitalism’ (p. xxii). To this anthropologist and biblical studies instructor, an idiosyncratic note flavors this volume.

Social scientific studies have come to permeate biblical studies for much longer than the first edition’s preface would imply with its statement that only ‘isolated’ (p. xvii) anthropological observations had previously been made about biblical topics. This claim would seem to ignore a key component of anthropology, linguistics. Yet even in archaeology, such inquiries have been in circulation from scholars such as Dennis Duling (one of the volume’s readers), Richard Horsley, Eric Hobsbawm and Sean Freyne. These are found in the ample references section, which affirms the authors’ acquaintance with the relevant fields, along with their indebtedness to Bruce Malina.

This is a highly readable and approachable volume, though a lingering peculiarity floats across its pages due to the large number of research fields it encompasses. I will first observe what this new edition of *Palestine in the Time of Jesus* does well and afterward will note some limitations. The volume's contents promise an attractive route for its readers: Chapter 1 discusses social science study, Chapter 2 looks at 'Kinship in Agrarian Roman Palestine', Chapter 3 addresses 'Politics and Patronage' issues, Chapter 4 is on political economy and Chapter 5 is about 'Political Religion'. The extensive glossaries define concepts and supplement them with biblical and other literary sources for context and relevance, and a number of clarifying charts appear throughout (e.g. the various Roman military units and political positions on pp. 170-71). The glossaries are a helpful resource for the study of late Second Temple Judaism in Roman Palestine. Together, the pieces form a handbook of linkages between social science and biblical studies that includes a wealth of working field terminology directed toward 'field' application to an ancient society, a pursuit well within the enlarging trend of social scientific studies.

Regarding the curiosities, the chapter topics flow from the anthropological concept of *ethnography* (though the term seems to be absent), and it is reasonable to expect only selective frame shots when the body of investigation involves 147 pages while its glossaries and bibliographies account for another 75 (i.e. some two-fifths of the total). The authors are well-versed and aim to be less daunting than Emil Shürer and Max Weber, but how does a book 'find its audience' when it goes from defining basic terms while featuring discussion of the difficult nuances of *Ioudaios* (p. 11) or charting 'monetization and marketization' (p. 80) or assuming their audience already knows the difference between "large group sporadic rebellion" and "small group haidukry" (p.81), for even the term itself will be unfamiliar to many? The intended audience may be undergraduate Bible majors or pastors with an anthropological bent, or something else, but it is hard to gauge this.

So this brings me back to that lingering question: to whom would I direct this informative volume? Its conclusion chapter hints at my uncertain response. 'The central goal of historical analysis is to explain change' (p. 149). The sociological concepts indeed reach for that, and admittedly, 'the elite were often in conflict with the interests of the peasants' (p. 150), but who is in need of basic terminological

definitions while reaching for models that facilitate analysis of societal change?

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