

***Class and Power in Roman Palestine: The Socioeconomic Setting of Judaism and Christian Origins.* By Anthony Keddie. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. xxv + 353 pp. \$120.00 cloth.**

*Class and Power in Roman Palestine* begins with a question: “Did the beginnings of Roman rule rip apart the fabric of Judean society, setting the stage for Jesus’s movement and the First Revolt?” (1). Spoiler alert: Keddie answers no. This superb book analyzes literary and archaeological evidence “to enhance and nuance our understanding of the sources, expressions, and consequences of the differences between elites and non-elites in Early Roman Palestine (63 BCE–70 CE).” It argues that “institutional change in Early Roman Palestine supported the empowerment of Judean elites and further entrenched longstanding differentials of power. At the same time, these institutional developments often . . . ameliorated the economic conditions of non-elites” (2). This calm tone belies the fact that these are fighting words.

As Keddie recognizes, one’s perspective on economy in the region depends on whether you are looking at literature—then you see exploitation and state violence—or archaeology—then you find a thriving market. Keddie discovers supraregional connectivity and strong market activity but also “disproportionate power of elites over non-elites” (7). The book steps into two roiling debates. The first involves the Roman economy. Walter Scheidel, Ian Morris, Richard Saller, Peter Temin, and others have recently debated: did the Roman Empire have what we would call a market economy? The second is a decades-long debate in New Testament studies regarding Roman imperialism, including use of postcolonial criticisms. For instance, Kwok Pui-lan and Jorg Rieger’s *Occupy Religion: Theology of the Multitude* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2012) ethically intervenes in contemporary political and economic inequalities by drawing upon New Testament texts. Richard Horsley posited a spiral of violence in Roman Palestine, with prophets resisting Roman economic and political oppression. Steven J. Friesen with Walter Scheidel charted a subtly differentiated economic scale (“The Size of the Economy and the Distribution of Income in the Roman Empire,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 99 [2009]: 61–91). L. L. Welborne’s review of Bruce Longenecker’s *Remember the Poor: Paul, Poverty, and the Greco-Roman World* (*Review of Biblical Literature* [2012]) shows two erudite scholars committed to historical investigations of wealth and poverty. In it, Welborne critiques those who do not analyze structural economic inequalities. Keddie’s erudite, helpful book could have enlisted some of the scholars just mentioned, and a follow-up volume might wish to treat more fully the ideologies, commitments, and contexts for scholars’ arguments about class and power.

*Class and Power’s* chapters center on institutions as loci for analysis of economics, the market, and social relations. Chapter 1, “Urban Development and the New Elites,” discusses the challenges of differentiating a large village from a *polis* and argues that urban development occurred in Roman Palestine at the behest of local elites rather than Roman imperial power. Papyrological and epigraphic evidence, along with Josephus, ground Keddie’s argument.

Chapter 2, “Land Tenancy and Agricultural Labor,” uses a “New Institutional Economics” framework (72). Keddie argues that conditions for tenants and laborers did not worsen under the Roman Empire. Keddie contends against Gerd Theissen, Douglas Oakman, and Richard Horsley, and he especially and respectfully resists John Kloppenborg’s idea that “tenancy in Palestine was introduced by foreign empires,

became more exploitative in the Early Roman period, and had a largely negative impact on Judaeen farmers and laborers, leading to the formation of a new proletariat" (75). This strong chapter would have been enriched by explicit engagement with economic models and the purpose of its use of terms like "alienation" and "proletariat."

Chapter 3, "Taxation: Render unto Caesar and the Local Elites," builds upon Fabian Udoh's *To Caesar What is Caesar's: Tribute, Taxes, and Imperial Administration in Early Roman Palestine (63 B.C.E.–70 C.E.)* (Brown Judaic Studies, 2005). Keddie corrects reconstructions of Jesus and his movement as a protest against Roman tax increases. He unfurls "the subtle and complex workings of taxation structures in the generation of economic inequality," arguing that an existing inequality gap in Palestine widened in the early Roman period, but non-elites were not "any more economically beleaguered than they had been for centuries" (111–112). This chapter contains wonkish treasures: stunning tax rates, data on benefactions from Herod and provincial elites, information about censuses, and the difference between *phoros* (land tribute) and *laographia* (poll tax).

Chapter 4, "Economy of the Sacred," takes seriously the economic language of cults. Case studies in the Ephesos's Artemision and Palmyra's Temple of Bel ground Keddie's demonstration that the Jerusalem Temple, too, was an economic center, drawing in goods from the *chōra*. Religious experts are simultaneously economic actors and beneficiaries. The chapter discusses tithes, the meanings of *qorban*, and the temple tax, drawing on Hayim Lapin's model for quantifying the Jerusalem Temple's economy.

Chapter 5, "Material Culture from Table to Grave," begins with discussions of the "archaeology of class" and the formation of "class subjectivities." Keddie recognizes the importance of books like *The Archaeology of Differences: Gender, Ethnicity, Class, and the "Other" in Antiquity* (D. Edwards and T. McCollough, eds. [American Schools of Oriental Research, 2007]). This chapter could have been enriched by using comparative data that fits well with Keddie's concerns about class found in the scholarship of Natalie Kampen, Sandra Joshel, Lauren Hackworth Petersen, and Sara Levin-Richardson and in the late antique materials adduced in Sarah Bond's *Trade and Taboo: Disreputable Professions in the Roman Mediterranean* (University of Michigan Press, 2016).

The volume offers three useful appendices: the dates and names of the Herodian rulers, the high priests of the early Roman period, and a summary of Palmyran duties of 137 CE. The latter reads like the raw data for a Tracy K. Smith poem, poignantly offering the prices for the enslaved, camel- or donkey-loads of materials, and prostitutes.

A delicious book provokes the desire to set a scholarly dinner table. At least, how would Keddie hospitably engage conversations about the intertwining of religion and economy, such as Devin Singh's *Divine Currency: The Theological Power of Money in the West* (Stanford University Press, 2018) or Jennifer Quigley's *Divine Accounting: Theo-Economics in the Letter to the Philippians* (Yale University Press, forthcoming)? Gender and ethnicity are suppressed categories in the book; how would the author sharpen his analysis in conversation with Black feminist legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw and her framework of intersectionality? If Keddie were seated next to Giovanni Bazzana (*Kingdom of Bureaucracy: The Political Theology of Village Scribes in the Sayings Gospel Q* [Peeters, 2015]), what would they say about scribes in Roman Palestine? Finally, I commend the book as essential, nutritious, and necessary to New Testament scholars.

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