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**Zangenberg, Jürgen and Michael Labahn, eds..**  
***Christians as a Religious Minority in a Multicultural City: Modes of Interaction and Identity Formation in Early Imperial Rome***

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Jonathan Reed  
University of La Verne  
La Verne, California 91750

As the title indicates, the articles in this collection focus on the first Christians in Rome, though they approach the topic from various methodological perspectives and based on different kinds of sources. Except for two, all chapters were originally presented as papers at a seminar jointly sponsored by the European Association for Biblical Studies and the Society of Biblical Literature during the summer of 2001 in Rome. The papers were then revised and are presented here as articles with full footnotes and a few illustrations. They are divided into two sections: “Part I: Minorities Living in Early Imperial Rome” (1–54) and “Part II: Rome, Roman Christians and their Relationship in Early Christian Writings and Archaeology,” which is grouped into three papers under the heading “New Testament Reflections on the Early Christian Community in Rome” (56–102) and five papers under “Persons and Positions in the Early Christian Community in Rome” (103–85). A short abstract in English is attached to each German article. There are indices of ancient sources and modern authors but no bibliography.

The first four articles survey the domestic context in Rome and the Christian, Jewish, and Egyptian minorities living in the early imperial city. Christiane Kunst describes the physical setting of home life in Rome, be it the multi-family *insula* or the single-family *domus* (“Wohnen in der antiken Grosstadt: Zur sozialen Topographie Roms in der frühen Kaiserzeit,” 2–19). She reminds us that, unlike modern cities where luxury and poverty are separated into neighborhoods, in ancient Rome units of the social hierarchy lived cheek-to-jowl in apartments and houses, with the latter often subdivided and remodeled for rental space. She compares the various living spaces by location, light, hygiene, security, and price, and does so by relying on both literary and archaeological evidence. Although

more plans would help illustrate her case, she nevertheless succeeds in painting a dismal picture of lower-class life and the cramped workplaces for servants and artisans such as one might imagine for Paul, Prisca, and Aquilla.

Peter Lampe's contribution is a compact summary of his magisterial *From Paul to Valentinus: Christians at Rome in the First Two Centuries* whose original German is often cited ("Early Christians in the City of Rome: Topographical and Social Historical Aspects of the First Three Centuries," 20–32). Lampe locates most Christians in first- and second-century C.E. Rome in working-class neighborhoods with many immigrants like Trastevere, along the Appian Way, and near the Viminal Gate, all areas beyond the *pomerium*, the ancient city's sacred boundary. He stresses the importance of aristocratic women in introducing Christianity to the Roman upper classes, suggests Christianity's appeal lay in the rarity of "extreme solidarity among members of lower social strata . . . in Roman society" (25), but also acknowledges its rampant factionalism.

Margaret H. Williams provides a similar summary for the Jewish community in Rome ("The Shaping of the Identity of the Jewish Community in Rome in Antiquity," 33–46). She depends primarily on literary sources for the earlier periods, from late republic and Julio-Claudians and Flavians, but then after the two Jewish wars with Rome increasingly takes advantage of the available epigraphic and catacomb evidence. She sees considerable continuity in Jewish identity with respect to the Mosaic law, but later an understandable waning of loyalty to the Hasmonean dynasty and the Temple in favor of local synagogues.

A nice comparative study on Egyptians in Rome by David Noy accentuates the uniqueness of the Jewish and Christian communities ("Being an Egyptian in Rome: Strategies of Identity Formation," 47–54). After reviewing the literary, epigraphic, architectural-decorative, and burial evidence, he states: "The inevitable conclusion is that Egyptians in Rome lacked any form or communal organization" (54). Egyptians assimilated rather quickly into Roman society, and some Romans adopted—at least superficially—Egyptian practices, like the worship of Isis, and burial customs that look like crude attempts to mummify the deceased. Interestingly, Alexandrians desperately sought to distinguish themselves from non-Alexandrian Egyptians, but Romans did not appreciate such nuances, perhaps similar to their initial inability to distinguish Christians among Jews.

Part IIa begins with two articles not at all about the social or religious history of the Roman community, but with literary phenomena in the New Testament. Michael Labahn argues that the shipwreck episode in Acts 27 sets up the importance of Paul's proclamation

in Rome in Acts 28 (“Boldly and Without Hindrance He Preached the Kingdom of God and Taught about the Lord Jesus Christ’ [Acts 28:31]: Paul’s Public Proclamation in Rome as the *Finale* of a Shipwreck,” 56–76).

Next, Caroline Johnson Hodge examines not the historical but the ideal readers constructed by Paul in Romans (“Olive Trees and Ethnicities: Judeans and Gentiles in Rom. 11.17–24,” 77–89). Indeed she cautions against using Romans for reconstructing the Christian community in Rome. That is the very thing Antonio Pitta tries to do with Paul’s discussion of “the strong” and “the weak” in Rom 14 (“The Strong, the Weak and the Mosaic Law in the Christian Communities of Rome [Rom. 14.1–15.13],” 90–102). Paul’s distinctive use of that metaphor there, compared to Corinthians, implies an awareness of the actual situation in Rome, where divisions were less socio-hierarchical or ethnic but based rather on competing ethical attitudes about the applicability of Torah.

Part IIb then focuses on people and positions in the Roman Church, and does so based on archaeological, epigraphic, and literary sources. The late John C. O’Neill, who passed away shortly before the volume’s publication and to whom it is dedicated, offers an examination of “Who Buried Peter and Paul?” (103–7). He suggests a burial “by devout Jews of their misguided compatriots who had fallen foul of Nero,” which later gave rise to the well-known legends of devout men from the East coming for their bodies. The location was unknown.

In contrast to this short paper, the longest and best-illustrated one follows, written by Jürgen Zangenberg, on the archaeology of Saint Peter’s tomb under the Vatican (“Gebeine des Apostelfürsten? Zu den angeblich frühchristlichen Gräbern unter der Peterskirche in Rom,” 108–38). Zangenberg provides a healthy dose of well-argued skepticism about the alleged tomb after a careful review of the excavations—importantly, he does not deal with that location (“Grab X”) in isolation, but considers it in the context of, and comparing it to, all the lower-class burials around the Vatican. He criticizes the usual reasons for presuming that the site is Christian and Peter’s tomb: the few surrounding burials supposedly oriented around the alleged site are no different than other clusters of family tombs; there may have been cremations that had since washed away or went undetected; and the animal-bone profile points to meals with the dead or even pagan sacrifices. In short, there are no *particularly* Christian characteristics about the site prior to 160 C.E. It is unlikely, according to Zangenberg, that the aedicule originally marked Peter’s burial; it was a more general memorial set up in memory of his martyrdom. It is thus one of the earliest-known places for Christian assembly, albeit somewhat inconspicuous inside the necropolis, but not the site of Peter’s burial. This is an important article both for its method and conclusion. Zangenberg does not, like so much

of biblical archaeology, try to prove or disprove a holy site by looking at it in isolation, but instead looks to the general archaeological context to conclude that early Christian burials and death rituals in Rome (and elsewhere) were almost indistinguishable from those of the surrounding culture. They adopted local traditions.

The final three articles examine non-canonical Christian writings as a way to understand social-historical problems or theological disputes within the Christian community in Rome. Martin Meiser describes the group behind 1 Clement as relatively educated with some exposure to pagan *paideia*, even though authority is sought almost exclusively in biblical texts as a way to demand higher ethical norms than their pagan neighbors. Any concern with Jews is conspicuously absent (“Das Christentum in Rom im Spiegel des ersten Clemensbriefes,” 139–56). Ismo Dunderberg has a fine contribution on “Valentinian Teachers in Rome,” which discusses the diversity of Valentianism (157–74). Posing the question about progressive esoteric teaching for advancing students, Dunderberg proposes a division between those Roman Valentians operating along the lines of a philosophical school and others who developed a distinct church organization. Finally, Jürgen Wehnert examines the complex literary and tradition history of the Pseudo-Clementines as a way to access some of the Jewish-Christian arguments against Paul and Pauline teachings (“*Petrus versus Paulus* in den Pseudoklementinischen Homilien 17,” 175–85).

This is an interesting collection, full of, at times competing, but mostly complementary approaches to understanding the earliest Christians as a minority in Rome. Perhaps what is missing is a contribution from the perspective of the majority, such as how the Augustan revolution reverberated throughout Roman urban life, how minorities might have been perceived over against civic religion or the newly invigorated *lares compitales*, or how Rome began to identify itself as the city that had absorbed the world’s people. Concerning the latter, the essays collected in *Rome the Cosmopolis* nicely complement a reading of this current volume (ed. Catharine Edwards and Greg Woolf; Cambridge University Press, 2003). Unfortunately very expensive, *Christians as a Religious Minority in a Multicultural City* is nevertheless recommended for serious scholars who want to remain up-to-date on developments in literary and archaeological studies on the early imperial city.