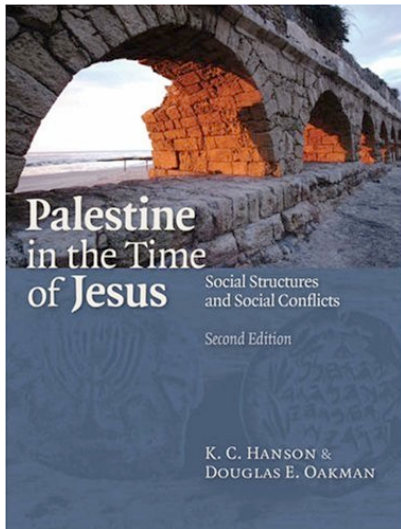


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Hanson, K. C., and Douglas E. Oakman

Palestine in the Time of Jesus: Social Structures and Social Conflicts

2nd edition

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This is the second edition of the book *Palestine in the Time* that was published in 1998 by K. C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman. This book was written with students in mind, as well as seminarians, pastors, and general readers. A well thought-out use of the social sciences, the authors explain in an understandable way the main social institutions and structures of ancient Palestine, with a view to how they are reproduced in and formed the first-century Jesus movement. Following a summary of social analysis and of the ancient world of Jesus, the central part of the book systematically presents major areas and institutions such as family, politics, and economy, always with an indication to specific biblical and other ancient texts. Although all of these methods of study are significant, it is essential to recognize that biblical texts transmit meanings derived through a specific culture and particular social arrangements (4). Scholars recognize that, for the most part, ancient texts refer to their contemporary social systems only obliquely; they assume that their readers somehow understand their worldviews and values.

The book has five chapters, the first of which surveys Roman Palestine. In chapter 2 the authors examine the concept of kinship in the agrarian Roman Palestine society. Chapters 3 and 4 examine the model of politics, the patronage system, and the political economy as it relates to the entire society. The political religion in Roman Palestine society is covered in chapter 5. In the last (ch. 6) and concluding chapter, the authors recommend specific leads and concrete instruction for further research. It is interesting to observe that Hanson

and Oakman begin each chapter with several texts from the Bible or other ancient document important to the topic, followed by questions that these texts raise.

Hanson and Oakman put together models (tools for putting together and interpreting social facts) or scenarios in order to examine these passages in the light of the original inquiries raised. These models and scenarios are taken from a selection of the sociological fields that shed light on the respective social Roman institutions. Thus Hanson and Oakman examine the tradition around Jesus with these models and gather unnoticed features and suggest culturally possible interpretations previously not imagined. After ending each chapter, the authors recommend ways to apply the perspective to biblical culture and the reader's own way of life; as a conclusion, they suggest readings from the bibliographies.

In the chapter on kinship, introduced by quotations of Matt 1:1 and Mark 3: 31–35, Hanson and Oakman offer a list of questions about lineage, honor, kinship groups, and insiders and outsiders. They use examples and models of family values in the community of the Mediterranean society as a source for their cross-cultural evaluation. In light of this background, the authors explore genealogies, cross- and parallel-marriages, bride-material goods, and laws of divorces and inheritance. At the end of the chapter they employ patterns and insights into the tradition in relationship with Jesus, in this case the account of his family tree in Matt 1:1–17. In Matthew's Mediterranean context, he records Jesus' Jewish ancestry from his mother side.

Chapters 2 and 3 describe the importance of the family, kinship, politics, power, and patronage in the agrarian Roman society in Palestine. In ancient Mediterranean societies of the first century, kinship was still the main social domain. Kinship in ancient Israel and Judah, as well as in first-century Palestine, was shaped by the political sphere especially in terms of law, for example, incest, rape, "marriage, divorce, paternity, and inheritance (21). But kinship also affected politics, most notably in

patron-client relationships and developing networks of friends. It is important to keep the role of the Romans firmly in mind, since they governed Judea as a minor imperial province. It is Rome that had controlled Palestine's politics and political economy, by the time of Jesus' ministry, for nearly one hundred years. Rome also influenced Israelite political religion through control and patronage of the Jerusalem high priesthood. Most of the people in the ancient Mediterranean world did not understand themselves in the individualistic model of post-modern Westerners, who can be described as "weak group." (70)

Persons were connected through kinship and the heads of their families, at a local geographical level, in their neighborhood or village. Additionally, one did not survive by one's own merits, but by being related to networks, family, friends, brokers, and patrons. These were the means by which one dealt with the serious power differentials in the ancient (peasant) world.

Hanson and Oakman deal with the political economy and religion in Roman Palestine in chapters 4 and 5. Agriculture was the primary focus of production in Roman Palestine. The high incidence of agrarian motifs in Jesus' parables corresponds with this. As we can see, the Gospels are rich with allusion to crops and agriculture operations. Parables such as the Planted Weeds (Matt 13:24–30), the Mustard Seed (Mark 4:30–32), or Harvest Time (Mark 4:26–29) indicate Jesus' careful observation of Galilean agriculture. The society in which Jesus lived was structured in such a way that basic decisions about agricultural production (what could be grown) were often not in the hands of those who actually worked the land. Jesus himself came from a small village and was a son of an artisan (*tekton*). Besides, because of the limitations in technology and organization of production, the ancient people tended to see the goods of life as in limited supply. Control of peasant life was affected in ancient agrarian societies by heavy demands for taxes, rents, and debt-repayments. Peasants did not freely supply labor for elites, nor did they work willingly for wages. According to Hanson and Oakman, most traditional peasants are as devoted to a self-sufficient household economy as elites are to the welfare of their estates (119). Circumstances were rather different in the first century. Whereas in our experience money controls everything else, in the first century money and the economy generally were subject to elite control.

The ancient societies were used to religious institutions implanted in other frameworks. The two routine places for religious expression were at home or in elite-controlled temples. Religious associations were found mainly in large cities of the first-century Roman Empire, and it may be doubted whether these were completely voluntary for all members. Membership in domestic or political religious institutions was culturally and historically conditioned. Support for religious institutions outside the family was obtained through taxation compelled by political authorities. One of the main religious activities in ancient time was the worship of the Roman emperors, and every Roman citizen was almost forced to worship the emperor's images throughout the cities. Every day in Jesus' time, the priests sacrificed one lamb in the morning and one in the evening, accompanied by meal and drink offerings. This was the *tamid*, the continuous offering, and it represented the basic sacrificial set each day. Many of the sacrifices and material supports for the Jerusalem temple were contributed involuntarily and need thus to be considered as a form of taxation.

Thirty-seven pages of glossaries and a thirteen-page list of bibliographic reference enhance the value of this book. The first glossary is an alphabetical list of ancient groups, institutions, objects, and events accompanied by select Hebrew, Greek, and Latin terms in each case. The purpose is to give and facilitate searches in concordances, lexicons, and computer databases for the construction of a more comprehensive word field book. The second glossary lists ancient documents, collections, and authors. Finally, the last glossary presents social-scientific and cross-cultural phrases. The useful part of these three glossaries is that they are in cross-references. Despite the fact that the main purpose of these glossaries is to give a better understanding of the book, they could be used also as a reference tool for an even wider circle of readers. The book has three main indexes: ancient sources; subjects; and authors.

The book is supplemented by a website (<http://www.kchanson.com/PTJ/ptj.html>) that offers additional resources for each chapter. The site presents photographs, maps, translated texts and interpretations, links to other sources, quotations from ancient documents, and reproduction of art works. The website enhances this book at a fraction of the cost of including such information in the hard copy itself.

In conclusion, readers will find this book most helpful for matters of social research in the first-century in Roman Palestine. Hanson and Oakman are to be commended for providing clear and readable material for lay readers, students, seminarians, and pastors. This second edition deserves a significant readership.