There is a maturing interest in the field of biblical studies for the use of social-science criticism and the interpretation of the Bible. Increasingly, scholars are adopting social models as heuristic tools in order to interpret biblical texts from culturally sensitive points of view. In like manner, Hellerman seeks to “survey the social landscape of the broader Roman world” in order to provide background for his analysis of the Christ hymn in Philippians 2 (1). In chapters 1 and 2 he concentrates on the status groups within the empire and delineates a model of familial and personal honor within the empire, with a view toward the *cursus honorum* among elites and nonelites. In chapters 3 and 4 he attempts to bring the social context of the empire to bear on the social setting of Philippi at the time of Paul. In chapters 5 and 6, Hellerman treats both the Philippian episode in Acts 16 and then the Christ hymn in Phil 2. This brings Hellerman to conclude that Christ experiences a *cursus pudorum* in the eyes of Paul as he experiences a humiliating death on the cross, yet in the end God “astoundingly” gives Christ highest honors.

In chapter 1, Hellerman begins by noting that the Roman Empire was primarily an agrarian society with a two-class system: the haves and have nots. Then, within each class, he notes the stratification among the rich, that is, senators, equestrians, and so forth.
Hellerman goes on to discuss the appearance of status in the empire such as the putting on of the *toga virilis*, having special seats in the theater, sitting at particular places at private banquets, having certain occupations, and so on. What Hellerman contributes to the broader discussion of status in the empire is his use of Roman, Greek, and Hebrew texts to demonstrate that many of the preoccupations with outward appearance and status manifested itself in the cultures around the circum-Mediterranean.

Chapter 2 delineates the value of honor within the circum-Mediterranean society. Of course, this has been acknowledged by a number of prominent biblical scholars, and the first half of the chapter reiterates this model for Hellerman’s purposes. Embedded within his argument are both Greek and Roman texts, yet he unnecessarily proclaims the “Romanness” of Philippi (46). If both Greek and Roman texts demonstrate the uses of honor and status in the empire, why is it necessary to proclaim Roman literature as a trump over and against Greek literature? What is more glaring in this chapter is the lack of reference to women’s status. There are plenty of examples in Italy of Roman women granting benefaction to cities and the like. If Philippi was romanized to the extent that Hellerman argues, then why does Hellerman not discuss this issue, which applies to a large population of the city? The second half of the chapter deals with the *cursus honorum*, or “honors race,” in the context of Rome itself and then in the provinces among groups such as the military, slaves, and general nonelites (again, Hellerman leaves women out of the discussion).

In chapter 3 Hellerman embarks on a history of the Philippian colony as predominantly Roman based on the dominance of Latin inscriptions. One only needs to glance through Pilhofer’s work to know that this is an overstatement (*Philippi*, vol. 2: *Katalog der Inschriften von Philippi* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000]). Both Greek and Roman inscriptions are well-attested throughout the city and its surroundings, and Hellerman fails to take the Greek inscriptions into account. He also notes devotion in the city to Jupiter, Neptune, Mercury, and Silvanus, but the archaeological record demonstrates that the representations of these gods are in short supply, while goddesses dominate the landscape and, therefore, would change the way one might look at the evidence, if this is taken into consideration. That said, Hellerman rightly notes, along with Oakes, that the Philippian hierarchy was made up of a majority of Romans. This is reinforced through the centralized worship of the emperor in the forum. Although correct in his assessment of elite Romans within the hierarchy of Philippi, little is done to note the conflation of Greek and Roman culture within the city and the impact it may have had on elite and nonelite sensibilities.

Chapter 4 is concerned specifically with the Latin inscriptions of both the elite and nonelite persons in the Philippian colony. Hellerman concentrates on those inscriptions
that demonstrate civic *cursus* and the ascension of various persons in terms of their offices within the city. Again, what is glaring here is the lack of attention to Greek inscriptions within the city. Even an aside noting that offices were not mentioned in the Greek inscriptions would have been helpful. Despite this lack, the list and analysis of the Latin inscriptions is enlightening and a needed contribution to the study of Philippi in general.

Furthermore, Hellerman notes the inscription of Diana Cazoria as a benefaction to the cult of Diana/Artemis. Although this one *patrona* is mentioned, Hellerman pays little attention to the iconography on Diana/Artemis within the area of Philippi. The goddess is attested at the walls of the city and outside of them toward the acropolis in great abundance, far more than any other member of the pantheon. This may point to a high population of women within the city and their continued benefaction to the cult. Lastly, inscriptions of freedpersons and slaves are analyzed in order to demonstrate that one could claim honor within one’s social group by calling attention to one’s attachment to a highly honored owner or previous owner.

Chapter 5 deals with the Philippians account in Acts 16 and makes reference to certain verses in the Philippian letter outside the context of Phil 2:6–11. Hellerman notes that Philippians was the most status-conscious colony in the east due to its Roman ideological origins. He notes the fivefold repetition of *strategoi* in Acts 16:20, 22, 35, 36, 38. This repetition, he argues, is indicative of the fact that the colony was thoroughly romanized at the top of the status chain. Furthermore, he notes that the author of Acts only calls Philippi a colony and, therefore, emphasizes the extreme Romanness of the city. He uses Antioch as an example, since the author of Acts calls the leaders “the leading men of the city,” rather than using specific official offices in describing them. This seems to be a tenuous argument but one that evokes questions about Philippi in contrast to other eastern cities. In terms of Acts as a whole and Hellerman’s treatment of it, it seems that he takes the narrative to be too historical in its content and trusts the author of Acts. Furthermore, there is no mention of the preponderance of women in Acts 16 and how that may reflect the makeup of the Philippian church, at least in the understanding of the author of Acts.

In the second half of chapter 5, Hellerman turns to Paul’s letter to the Philippians. He interprets Paul’s intent as one of reversing the norms of the Philippian colony by rejecting the need to proclaim his social value through his apostleship. He notes that Paul honors the *episkopoi* and *diakonoi* and calls himself a slave. This may be the case in terms of honor and shame in the Philippian church, but it may also be helpful to bring into the discussion the possibility of self-effacement as a means to honorable speech (e.g., Plutarch, *On Praising Oneself Inoffensively*). His assessment of Paul’s self-effacement in
Phil 1 must be taken into consideration with his call to imitate himself in 3:17. It seems that Paul’s self-effacement works to his advantage in terms of establishing his position in the community inoffensively while still claiming to be the one who is ultimately to be imitated. Furthermore, Hellerman discusses the leaders as having “titles” (118). This, of course, is pertinent in connecting their titles to those titles found in the Latin inscriptions as honor-claiming offices, but it seems that offices in the church were rather vague at this point in the church’s history, and it would be more prudent to call them descriptors or functions rather than translating them “bishops and deacons” (1:1).

In chapter 6 Hellerman treats the *Carmen Christi* as *Cursus Pudorum*. His purpose in this chapter is to bring to bear the social context of the Philippian Christ followers on the interpretation of the Christ hymn. This social context, Hellerman argues, contrasts with Paul’s call to imitate Christ in an inversion of the dominant culture’s understanding of honor. He then splits the hymn into three sections representing the three levels of Christ’s degradation. In the first level (2:6), Hellerman understands Paul as beginning to deconstruct Roman social norms and reconstruct the norms of a new community. He notes the contrast between Jesus’ shame and Roman need for glory and honor. The second level of degradation for Jesus is found in 2:7a. Here Christ is described as leaving his former glory and becoming a slave. Hellerman rightly notes the ambiguous status of slaves in the Greco-Roman world and has a brief, yet helpful, delineation of slavery in the ancient world. The third level of humiliation is found in 2:7b–8. Here Jesus humbles himself and his crucifixion is recognized. Christ reaches the nadir of his humiliation at the cross. Immediately following the description of Christ’s shame, Paul notes that God has subsequently exalted Christ “above every name” (2:9). Hellerman understands this name as trumping all other titles or honors. Furthermore, Hellerman posits that the title *kyrios* was a direct challenge to the supremacy of the emperor. Therefore, Christ’s surrender is in sharp contrast to the emperor’s greed for honor. Because Jesus emptied himself for others, God gave him honor and status.

In chapter 7 Hellerman finally states that, “instead of rejecting in principles the social realities of honor and shame, therefore, Paul and those who shared his sentiments sought to reconstruct the cultural values and social codes of the Roman world by submitting” (165). This conclusion is apt in view of honor in the Mediterranean world.

In terms of its strength, this study is a strong contribution in the field of social-science analysis and the interpretation of biblical texts. Using honor as a model to understand the elite of Philippi, Hellerman mines a variety of primary texts and inscriptions that help the reader to understand this social dynamic in the ancient world. However, some gaps in the study need filling. A cogent assessment of women in Philippi, with a view toward the cults in and outside the city walls, would shed light on a larger portion of the population. Also,
a thorough study of the Greek inscriptions may shed light on a more complex dynamic between Greek and Roman culture in Philippi. However, in spite of these shortcomings, Hellerman’s work is a welcome contribution to Pauline studies and to Philippian studies in particular.