

Introduction

Oppression of lower-status persons in the form of socioeconomic deprivation is widespread. The political struggle against oppression unites everyone interested in liberation and justice. Around the globe, women experience socioeconomic gender discrimination multiplied by race, class, age, religion, sexual preference, and ethnicity discrimination.¹ My scholarship constitutes an effort to intervene in this discrimination through comparison of different historical understandings of women. I aim to contribute to emancipatory knowledge of gender as it appears in frameworks of socioeconomic analysis. In this book, I investigate the socioeconomic situation and religious status of women in the first two centuries of the common era. In writing history, we contribute to the knowledge that articulates and legitimizes our worlds of meaning since we rely on contemporary frameworks to understand the past. Telling the history of women draws from and constructs contemporary understandings of women. I hope that this study of religious history contributes to knowledge about women's socioeconomic status and about how understandings of women have been inflected by wealth, race, ethnicity, religion, and legal status.

In the following sections, I describe the parameters of the study, then I introduce the texts and my analytical approach to them. I have selected texts on the basis of their significance in scholarship on women's religious status² and scholarship on women in socioeconomic institutions. Investigation of these texts requires a critical framework that integrates material relations, ideology, and the production of difference. I draw on materialist feminist theory as well as socioeconomic and feminist histories of the Roman Empire. After introducing this analytical framework, I turn to a brief overview of the rest of the study.

1. Martha Chen, Joann Vanek, et al., *Progress of the World's Women 2005 Overview: Women, Work & Poverty*(New York: United Nations Development Fund for Women, 2005). *Women and Children: The Double Dividend of Gender Equality*(The State of the World's Children 2007; New York: United Nations Children's Fund, 2006).

2. By "religious status," I refer to women's status in religious groups; I analyze religious groups as an integral component of social relations.

PARAMETERS OF THE STUDY

The subjects of this historical study are texts about religious women in western Turkey (Asia Minor) in the first two centuries of the common era. I eschew the labels “Jewish, Christian, Pagan” since all are anachronistic for the first century. These texts about women are analyzed as part of the political, historical, social situation of the eastern Roman Empire. I focus on sources that originated in western Asia Minor in the first two centuries of the common era. In the first century, the earliest documents of the movement that would become Christianity appeared. These documents are particularly interesting because few literary sources survive from this period that directly address non-elite persons in religious groups. The end of the second century is a practical approximation to close the period, since the grant of universal citizenship in 212 c.e. marks an era easily recognizable in epigraphic sources.³

The types of sources used in this study include inscriptions and iconography in addition to literary texts. The sources all represent the same social historical context, although a few vary from the target date or geography. For each item, I note the date and geographical provenance. Most of the sources are from western Asia Minor, while a few belong to the wider cultural context around the Aegean Sea during the late Hellenistic and early Roman era. I proceed on the assumption that images and inscriptions from within or near western Asia Minor in the first two centuries of the common era belong to the same cultural context as the literary sources from religious groups of the same era and locale.⁴ For example, the iconography of women on funerary monuments represents the symbolic world of a specific historical cultural context, which was shared by artists, viewers, authors, readers, and hearers of the region in that era.

Even though I seem to imply a cultural unity by demarcating geographic and temporal parameters, I have not sought to unify the sources to establish one metanarrative of women’s status. The themes of diversity and struggle characterize my models of economic and religious history.⁵ Rather than

3. On dating inscriptions, A. Geoffrey Woodhead, *The Study of Greek Inscriptions* (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 52–66.

4. On property ownership by funerary inscribers, see Elizabeth A. Meyer, “Explaining the Epigraphic Habit in the Roman Empire: The Evidence of Epitaphs,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 80 (1990): 74–96. Also see Greg Woolf, “Monumental Writing and the Expansion of Roman Society in the Early Empire,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 86 (1996): 22–39.

5. See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon, 1992), 94–96.

reconstructing a narrative of decline or progress for women's status over time, I posit an ongoing negotiation of diversity among religious groups.

SOURCES

Scholarship on women continues to debate wealthy women's access to leadership in the ancient world.⁶ Scholarly interpretations of women's religious status have rested on views of women's (subordinate) social status. However, the frameworks used to analyze social status have not included a thorough economic analysis.⁷ This economic aspect is crucial because these texts depict women with reference to institutions of particular socioeconomic significance: the household, patronage, and slavery. Thus I focus on texts about women's religious status and their socioeconomic status in households, patronage, and slavery.

In order to study the status of freeborn wealthy women in households, I examine the two letters of Ignatius to religious groups in Smyrna.⁸ Scholarship on these texts has discussed the status of both unmarried women in households without men as well as wives in their husbands' households.⁹ I inform my interpretation of these texts by drawing on scholarship about iconographic and epigraphic representations of wealthy married and widowed women.¹⁰ Studies of these representations are based on funerary monuments and legal inscriptions. I analyze representations that originate in the same historical

6. I cite prominent studies in the following discussion.

7. See Steve Friesen's critique of the category of social status and his suggestion that scholarship attend more closely to economic categories. Steven J. Friesen, "Poverty in Pauline Studies: Beyond the So-called New Consensus," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 26, no. 3 (2004): 323–61.

8. These are Ignatius' *To the Smyrnaeans* and *To Polycarp*.

9. While 1 Timothy is another text that discusses both wives and widows, the household situation of the widows in this text is somewhat less clear than it is in the two letters of Ignatius to Smyrna. However, it is possible that one could make an argument for that text very similar to the one I make for the letters to Smyrna.

10. Ernst Pfuhl and Hans Möbius, *Die ostgriechischen Grabreliefs*, 2 vols. (Mainz am Rhein: Von Zabern, 1977–79). Marielouise Cremer, *Hellenistisch-römische Grabstelen im nordwestlichen Kleinasien*, vol. 1 Mysien (Asia Minor Studien Band 4.1; Bonn: GMBH, 1991). Johanna Fabricius, *Die hellenistischen Totenmahlreliefs: Grabrepräsentation und Wertvorstellungen in ostgriechischen Städten* (Studien zur antiken Stadt 3; München: Friedrich Pfeil, 1999). Miltiade B. Hatzopoulos, *Revue des Études Grecs* 115, no. 254 (2002): 672. G. Petzl, *Die Beichtinschriften Westkleinasiens* (Epigraphica Anatolica 22; Bonn: Habelt, 1994). H. W. Pleker, *Epigraphica II: Texts on the Social History of the Greek World* (Leiden: Brill, 1969). Paul Zanker, "Bürgerliche Selbstdarstellung am Grab im römischen Kaiserreich," in *Die Römische Stadt im 2. Jahrhundert nach Christ* (Köln: Rheinland, 1992).

context as the Ignatian texts in order to understand wealthy women's status in households in Smyrna.

Studies on the leadership status of women have ventured beyond consideration of women's household status to explore their involvement in patronage. Texts that mention the status of wealthy widows in religious groups have received scholarly attention, but the relationship between women's religious status and social status remains unclear. Scholarship on women's patronage of religious groups has focused especially on female figures in several texts and an inscription: Phoebe in Paul's Letter to the Romans, Tryphaena in the *Acts of Thecla*, and Rufina in an inscription from Smyrna.¹¹ Social historical studies have presented epigraphic and legal sources that feature wealthy women.¹² I analyze the material that depicts wealthy women's socioeconomic relationships with regard to patronage, especially patronage of religious associations. This analysis provides historical context for interpretation of the texts about wealthy widows' religious status.

In addition to households and patronage, slavery and freedom determined women's status and access to wealth. The third category of texts I examine highlights the status of slave women. Understanding slaves' religious status is critical for study of texts about slave manumissions.¹³ The texts relevant to Asia

11. Respectively, these are Rom. 16:1-2, the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, C1J 2.741. Phoebe was from Cenchreae, near Corinth, rather than Asia Minor. However, Paul, our informant in this case, traveled throughout the eastern Mediterranean. The land areas around the Aegean in both Greece and Asia Minor were on the major route between Rome and its eastern provinces. Scholarship usually discusses the area around the Aegean Sea as a single cultural unit. I discuss Phoebe in terms of patronage, an institution that operated in a similar way throughout the eastern Mediterranean.

12. See the sources cited in note 9 above. Riet van Bremen, *The Limits of Participation: Women and Civic Life in the Greek East in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods* (Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 1996). Bernadette J. Broton, *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue: Inscriptional Evidence and Background Issues* (Chico, CA: Scholars, 1982). T. Rajak, "Benefactors in the Greco-Jewish Diaspora," in *Geschichte—Tradition—Reflexion*, vol. 1, *Judentum*, ed. Peter Schafer (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1996). Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1982). M. Misset-van de Weg, "A Wealthy Woman Named Tryphaena: Patroness of Thecla of Iconium," in *The Apocryphal Acts of Paul and Thecla*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1996), 16–35. M. R. Lefkowitz and M. B. Fant, *Women's Lives in Greece and Rome* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992). Ross Kraemer, *Maenads, Martyrs, Matrons, Monastics: A Sourcebook on Women's Religions in the Greco-Roman World* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988). Onno M. van Nijf, *The Civic World of Professional Associations in the Roman East* (Amsterdam: Gieben, 1997).

13. J. Albert Harrill, "Ignatius, Ad Polycarp. 4.3 and the Corporate Manumission of Christian Slaves," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 1, no. 2 (1993): 107–42. E. Leigh Gibson, *The Jewish Manumission Inscriptions of the Bosphorus Kingdom* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999). Carolyn Osiek, "Ransom of Captives: Evolution of a Tradition," *Harvard Theological Review* 74, no. 4 (Oct. 1981): 365–86. G. H. R.

Minor include inscriptions and a letter: Bosphoran synagogue manumissions and the Letter of Ignatius to Polycarp.¹⁴ The Bosphorus region was north of Asia Minor, on the north shore of the Black Sea. This region sustained connections to cities around the Aegean throughout antiquity by way of commercial ties, political relations, and Greek immigration. Jewish communities in the Bosphorus shared cultural forms with synagogues in Asia Minor; thus I analyze the Bosphoran synagogue inscriptions as part of the study of slaves' religious status in Asia Minor. My study of these texts seeks first to understand slavery and slave women's socioeconomic status by analyzing inscriptional and iconographic sources on slave women that scholarship has identified in Asia Minor.¹⁵ This socioeconomic analysis of slave women's status enables a more thorough understanding of their religious status than reliance on social analysis alone. The socioeconomic analysis informs my interpretation of the texts about slaves' status in manumission and religious groups.

Investigation of these texts about religious status and socioeconomic status requires a critical framework that analyzes gender, race, ethnicity, marriage, slavery, and colonialization as well as religion and access to wealth. In the following section, I propose a method of historical material inquiry.

Horsley and S. R. Llewelyn, eds., *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981). Jennifer Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). J. Albert Harrill, *Slaves in the New Testament: Literary, Social and Moral Dimensions* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006); Allen Dwight Callahan, Richard A. Horsley, and Abraham Smith, eds., *Slavery in Text and Interpretation* (*Semeia* 83/84; Atlanta: SBL, 1998); J. Albert Harrill, *The Manumission of Slaves in Early Christianity* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1995); and Dale Martin, "Slavery and the Ancient Jewish Family," in *The Jewish Family in Antiquity*, ed. Shaye Cohen (Atlanta: Scholars, 1993), 113–29.

14. J. Albert Harrill, "Ignatius, Ad Polycarp. 4.3," 107–42. E. Leigh Gibson, *Jewish Manumission Inscriptions of the Bosphorus Kingdom*.

15. Ernst Pfuhl and Hans Möbius, *Die ostgriechischen Grabreliefs*, 2 vols. (Mainz am Rhein: Von Zabern, 1977–79). Dale B. Martin, "The Construction of the Ancient Family: Methodological Considerations," *Journal of Roman Studies* 86 (1996): 42. Martin P. Nilsson, *Timbres Amphoriques de Lindos*, *Exploration Archéologique de Rhodes* 5 (Copenhagen: Imprimerie Bianco Luno, 1909), 101–3. Jean-Jacques Aubert, *Business Managers in Ancient Rome: A Social and Economic Study of Institores, 200 B.C.–A.D. 250* (Leiden: Brill, 1994); G. H. R. Horsley and S. R. Llewelyn, eds., *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981). Reinhold Merkelbach and Josef Stauber, eds., *Steinepigramme aus dem griechischen Osten* (Stuttgart: B. G. Teubner, 1998–2002).

METHOD AND MODEL

HISTORICAL MATERIALIST FEMINISM

My approach to this investigation relies on methods of gathering evidence and analyzing sources that prevail in historical studies. I work with the assumption that historiographic quality depends on attention to the particularity of the contexts in which evidence originated. I defined temporal and geographic parameters for the sources in the preceding discussion in the interests of historical accuracy and completeness. Within these limits, I have drawn on different types of sources, since feminist historians have established a connection between critical analysis and the use of different genres.¹⁶ Historical work requires a self-reflexivity necessary to analyze the contexts and interests of scholarship. Since texts and interpreters all have particular interests, the relationship between source and history requires theoretical attention.

This historical inquiry draws on the theory of materialist feminism, particularly the thought of Rosemary Hennessy. The challenge has been to develop a framework to study simultaneously socioeconomic structures and texts about religious women. Hennessy links discourse to social structures through her explanation of “the materiality of language.”¹⁷ She analyzes discourse as ideology that produces material structures and relations even as this materiality shapes ideology.

As the medium of social action and the mechanism through which subjects are constructed, ideology produces what can be seen, heard, spoken, thought, believed, valued—in other words, what counts as socially made “reality.” . . . The discourses that constitute the *material*

16. For example, Natalie Kampen, *Image and Status: Roman Working Women in Ostia* (Berlin: Mann, 1981). I return to this point in the following discussion.

17. Study of the materiality of language is particularly significant to the study of religion because material relations and structures in religion have not received enough attention from scholars. David Chidester has called for intervention aimed at developing theory in the study of religious materiality, possibly by “reconstructing the genealogy of dematerialized religion.” Chidester, “Material Terms for the Study of Religion,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 68, no 2 (June 2000): 367–80. The article reviews Mark C. Taylor, ed., *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). “Under the impact of European colonialism, as Sam Gill suggests, colonized people have undergone a dematerialization—or deterritorialization—in the terms that have satisfied Western territorial needs, whether colonial, conceptual, or observational’ (312). In support of a variety of colonizing projects, the colonial fantasy of a disembodied ‘primitive mentality,’ and its conceptual descendants, substantially contributed to the production of a dematerialized religion” (376).

structures through which ideology works are shaped by the *material* relations which comprise economic and political practices.¹⁸

As ideology, discourse takes specific historical forms. However, ideology is not monolithic in any historical configuration, but negotiated and contested. “The dominating ideology never dominates without contradiction.”¹⁹ Economic and political practices involve steady articulation and reproduction of the dominant social relations. Competing ideologies and material relations become visible in critical analysis of the elaboration of social relations.

The dominating ideology and material relations smooth over contradictions and ambiguities. In Hennessy’s terms, this work of concealment occurs through the naturalizing operation of the discursive “preconstructed”—that which “everyone knows” and which “serves as an anchor in the symbolic order for the articulation of subjectivities across race, class, gender, and other salient differences.” Feminist analysis intervenes in this preconstructed through analysis of contradictions and ambiguities in political and economic terms. For instance, Maria Mies’s analysis of the constructions of gender, race, and class underpins her study of colonialization and family formation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by highlighting contradictions in the process of “‘naturalization’ of colonized women.”²⁰ As a feminist study, Mies’s history displaces gender, race, and class from their positions as naturalized knowledge so that a different knowledge of women’s history becomes available.

Feminist economics places women and non-elite men in the foreground by exposing the preconstructed in economic categories. For instance, it has been “natural” to conceive of a mother’s place in the household as necessary and nonarbitrary. Mies has evaluated this conception of the role of women as biological determinism.

18. Rosemary Hennessy, *Materialist Feminism and the Politics of Discourse* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 75. Italics in original.

19. For the following discussion, see Hennessy, *Materialist Feminism*, 76–79.

20. Maria Mies, “Colonization and Housewifization,” in *Materialist Feminism: A Reader in Class, Difference, and Women’s Lives*, ed. Rosemary Hennessy and Chrys Ingraham (New York: Routledge, 1997), 179. A closely related branch of scholarship uses “intersectional analysis” to study the operations of gender, race, and class as multiplicative factors in oppression. See Bonnie Thornton Dill and Ruth Enid Zambrana, eds., *Emerging Intersections: Race, Class and Gender in Theory, Policy, and Practice* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009).

Too often this concept [biological determinism] has been used to explain social inequalities or exploitative relations as inborn, and hence, beyond the scope of social change. Women should be particularly suspicious when this term is used to explain their status in society. Their share in the production and reproduction of life is usually defined as a function of their biology or “nature.” Thus, women’s household and child-care work are seen as an extension of their physiology. . . . All the labour that goes into the production of life, including the labour of giving birth to a child, is not seen as the conscious interaction of a human being with nature, that is, a truly human activity, but rather as an activity of nature.²¹

In contrast with birth and childcare, a male worker’s use of his bodily strength, for instance, to dig a foundation, has not been seen as a fact of nature, but as paid labor. A biological conception of the natural role of women emerges in economic assumptions because gender operates as a preconstructed given already embedded in material structures. Economic and political systems maintain reproduction, and child and elderly care as “private” work, unskilled, and unpaid or poorly paid. These material structures lower women’s economic status (as a social group) even as the political system proclaims the equality of men and women in democratic processes. Material feminist analysis seeks to displace the ascriptions of difference (such as gender) that function in discrimination and exploitation.

Feminist economists have investigated economic models for factors at work in the omission or marginalization of the situation of women and lower-status men.²² In a study of agrarian societies, B. Lynne Milgram concludes:

Marginalization of the “domestic” sphere by neoclassical economists has overlooked how such activities for women in Southeast Asia encompass economic and commercial value beyond the normal consumptive needs of the family and household . . . women’s labor

21. Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour* (London: Zed Books, 1986).

22. “Feminist economics argues that gender inequality stems from a system of gendered power relations that permeate the whole economy and underpin norms for male and female roles and responsibilities.” Diane Elson, Caren Grown, and Irene van Staveren, “Why a Feminist Economics of Trade?” in *The Feminist Economics of Trade*, ed. Irene van Staveren, Diane Elson, Caren Grown, and Nilufer Çagatay (New York: Routledge, 2007), quotation p. 1.

thus makes a significant contribution to the well-being and economic productivity of their household and plays a fundamental role in maintaining the peasant economy and reproducing cultural capital.²³

Also, within the United States, there are “hundreds of thousands” of “women, who, because they are immigrant and/or undocumented, remain doubly marginalized, voiceless, and invisible.”²⁴ Subsistence workers and “hidden” labor must be made visible in our analyses of economy in order to reconstruct the history of women’s socioeconomic and religious status.

Economic distinctions that reinscribe gender overlap with categories of class (or strata), colonial status, race, and ethnicity.²⁵ Economic analysis has strongly devalued some kinds of work and workers.

The legacies of the positivist IR/IPE [international relations/international political economy] inquiry persist in the tendency to view power as a tangible entity or resource, and to seek out power-wielding people as the subjects of research. Work is thus equated with monetized economic activity and workers are conceptualized as a commodity, so those whose working practices are unprotected or subordinate receive little or no recognition in IR/IPE research. In a sense it is assumed that those who do not possess power as a resource are not significant to our understanding of the global political economy.²⁶

While this is a statement about our current situation, exclusionary economic analysis persists also in historical economic studies. Our thinking

23. B. Lynne Milgram, “Women, Modernity, and the Global Economy: Negotiating Gender and Economic Difference in Ifuago, Upland Philippines,” in *Gender at Work in Economic Life*, ed. Gracia Clark (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 2003), 98–99.

24. Daisy L. Machado, “Response to ‘Solidarity and the Accountability of Academic Feminists and Church Activists to Typical (World Majority) Women,’” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 20, no. 2 (2004): 152.

25. Kwok Pui-lan notes that economic analysis must include the ways gender has featured in relationships between colonizers and colonized. Kwok Pui-lan, “Mercy Amba Oduyoye and African Women’s Theology,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 20, no. 1 (2004): 8.

26. Louise Amoore, “Invisible Subject(s): Work and Workers in the Global Political Economy,” in *Poverty and the Production of World Politics: Unprotected Workers in the Global Political Economy*, ed. Matt Davies and Magnus Ryner (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 21.

about the ancient economy depends on contemporary economic theory, and women and lower-status men remain in the margins even in analyses of contemporary economic systems.

The omission of gender, race, class, and colonialism as categories of analysis has significant consequences for economic models since these distinctions are embedded in notions of wages, productivity, family, household, and the sexual division of labor. A number of studies have argued the gendered, racialized, and class-bound character of concepts of skill, wages, labor, and productivity.²⁷ For instance, Yildiz Ecevit's modern study of work done by Turkish women suggests that the skills that women acquired in the home, such as dexterity and accuracy, are attributed to women's nature instead of to their training and education.²⁸ Such findings of feminist economists challenge us to interrogate critically the frameworks we use to write histories of ancient economies.²⁹ A model of the Roman economy, for instance, would be inadequate if it classified the work of wives or slaves as unskilled and dismissed them from economic analysis.

The insights of feminist economists are helpful for investigating the correlation between modern economic systems and historiography. In a global perspective, the consumer capitalist economies of "overdeveloped" countries are intertwined with the subsistence economies of "underdeveloped" countries. Maria Mies argues that "this general production of life, or subsistence production—mainly performed through the non-wage labour of women and other non-wage labourers as slaves, contract workers and peasants in the colonies—constitutes the perennial basis upon which 'capitalist productive labour' can be built up and exploited."³⁰ From a global perspective, most scholars enjoy the positions of elites in the world system. Steven Friesen theorizes the lack of attention to poverty in studies of Pauline communities in terms of the economic assumptions and contexts of biblical interpreters.³¹

27. Ava Baron, *Work Engendered: Toward a New History of American Labor* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991). Elizabeth Higginbotham and Mary Romero, eds., *Women and Work: Exploring Race, Ethnicity, and Class* (London: Sage, 1997).

28. Yildiz Ecevit, "Shopfloor Control: The Ideological Construction of Turkish Women Factory Workers," in *Working Women: International Perspectives on Labour and Gender Ideology*, ed. Nanette Redcliff and M. Thea Sinclair (London: Routledge, 1991), 56–78.

29. However, two recent publications on methodology in the study of ancient economies omit women, gender, and feminist scholarship. Peter F. Bang, Mamoru Ikeguchi, and Hartmut G. Ziche, eds., *Ancient Economies, Modern Methodologies: Archaeology, Comparative History, Models and Institutions* (Bari, Italy: Edipuglia, 2006). J. G. Manning and Ian Morris, *Ancient Economy: Evidence and Models* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

30. Mies, *Patriarchy*, 48.

The privileges of elites influence our perspective and add to the difficulty of modeling the ancient agrarian subsistence economy.³² A view from the top obscures the lower strata that support positions of privilege.

The study of economics relies on critical feminist analysis to investigate economic distinctions and models for embedded ascriptions of difference in terms such as gender, race, class, and colonialism. Feminist economists have complicated the use of dualisms in feminine/masculine roles, domestic/public, house/market, skilled/unskilled, paid/unpaid, and the status of work and workers associated with these distinctions. Hennessy's materialist feminism theorizes these studies as interventions to displace the prevailing constructions of gender, race, class, and colonialism that produce (and are produced by) dominant social relations in political and economic systems. Hennessy and others have shown that this can be done by focusing on contradictions and ambiguities that indicate the presence of less prominent and submerged ideologies. For instance, a contradiction emerges between the view that "domestic" work is hidden unpaid labor and that "domestic work" is essential subsistence labor. Such contradictions highlight assumptions of gender, race, class, and colonialism in "domestic" work. A materialist feminist approach allows the emergence of new understandings of work and the status of workers, understandings essential to the transformation of political and economic systems.

In sum, this study incorporates three principal modes of inquiry—historical, materialist, and feminist—which structure my approach to sources and writing history. Since each historical artifact about women is analyzed in terms of dominant ideologies and material relations, I turn first to describe a model of dominant relations with respect to political power, imperial ideologies, and the production of socioeconomic status.

MODELING THE ROMAN EMPIRE

Ideally, a socioeconomic model presents not only the production and exchange of goods and services, but also the production of socioeconomic inequality, or differential access to resources. The model explains the reproduction of groups with various socioeconomic interests. It shows relationships between

31. Friesen, "Poverty in Pauline Studies."

32. See Richard Saller, "Framing the Debate over the Growth in the Ancient Economy," in *The Ancient Economy*, ed. Manning and Morris, 223–38; Stephen Mitchell and Constantina Katsari, "Introduction: The Economy of Asia Minor," in *Patterns in the Economy of Asia Minor*, ed. Mitchell and Katsari (Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2005), xiii–xxxii.

such groups and how those relationships might change. It explains the production and maintenance of categories of access to socioeconomic resources. The model shows how socioeconomic forces vary with social location, and it allows for integration between socioeconomic structures and other social relations, such as politics and religion.

Narrative socioeconomic models are better suited to the available data for the ancient world than are mathematical models.³³ Networks, change, horizontal distinctions, and relationships are difficult to diagram, and require narrative. Diagrams and visual models supplement narrative reconstructions. Geza Alföldy has constructed a model of the society of the Roman Empire as a pyramid ranging from emperor at the apex to masses living at and below subsistence level at the base.³⁴ This model emphasizes differences between men based on legal definitions and economic status. However, it does not articulate either women as distinct groups or gender as a determinant of status. With minor variations, this model of ancient society has been widely accepted and qualified.³⁵

Ekkehard Stegemann and Wolfgang Stegemann have built on Alföldy's model of stratification by adopting an emphasis on property as a criterion for determination of stratum.³⁶ (See Figure 1.³⁷) "The material possession of personal and real property conveys, on the one hand, a form of power (namely, influence), but is, on the other hand, an (essential) part of the *privileges* that members of the upper stratum enjoy." The other important source of power belonged to those who held political office; it was not available to women, male slaves, and freedmen, who were excluded from high political or military office. The Stegemanns refer to "women and family members" as influential because of their possessions, but as distinct from "the ruling class."³⁸ This distinction between the ruling class and others in the same household is obscured where the

33. Neville Morley, "Narrative Economy," in *Ancient Economies, Modern Methodologies: Archaeology, Comparative History, Models and Institutions*, ed. Peter F. Bang, Mamoru Ikeguchi, and Hartmut G. Ziche (Bari, Italy: Edipuglia, 2006).

34. Geza Alföldy, *The Social History of Rome* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), 94–156, esp. 146, Fig. 1.

35. Walter Scheidel and Steven J. Friesen, "The Size of the Economy and the Distribution of Income in the Roman Empire," *Journal of Roman Studies* 99 (2009): 61–91; Glenn R. Storey, "Cui Bono? An Economic Cost-Benefit Analysis of Statuses in the Roman Empire," in *Hierarchies in Action: Cui Bono?*, ed. Michael W. Diehl (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 340–74.

36. For the following discussion, Ekkehard W. Stegemann and Wolfgang Stegemann, *The Jesus Movement: A Social History of Its First Century*, trans. O. C. Dean (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 61–65.

37. *Ibid.*, 72.

38. *Ibid.*, 64.

socioeconomic model is based on the ranks of free men (as in Alföldy's model). While the Stegemanns discuss the difficulties in representing women on the pyramid of stratification, their model remains based on the socioeconomic position of men.

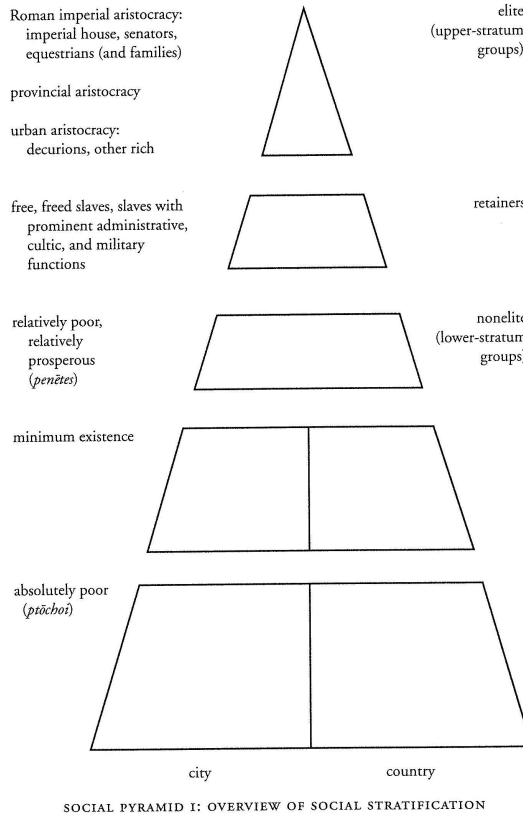


Figure 1. Diagram of the Stegemann's Pyramid.³⁹

Feminist historian and theorist Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has developed a sociostructural model of the comprehensive structure of domination and

39. Ekkehard W. Stegemann and Wolfgang Stegemann, *The Jesus Movement: A Social History of Its First Century*, trans. O. C. Dean (Fortress Press, 1999), p. 72.

stratification in the Roman Empire, that is, kyriarchy. (See Figure 2.⁴⁰) Kyriarchy, a neologism introduced by Schüssler Fiorenza, refers to “the domination of the lord, slave master, husband, the elite freeborn educated and propertied man over all wo/men and subaltern men.”⁴¹ In this model, gender overlaps with other status-producing distinctions and systems of domination. Since the various systems for producing differences overlap, interact, and multiply oppressions, none can be thoroughly analyzed in isolation from its effects on the whole.⁴² Kyriarchy has operated in discrete social institutions as well as in the symbolic realm where, as kyriocentrism, it has “the ideological function of naturalizing and legitimating not just gender but all forms of domination.”⁴³ Kyriocentrism produces preconstructed “commonsense” understandings of kyriarchal religious, political, and socioeconomic institutions.⁴⁴

40. Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said*, 117.

41. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation* (New York: Continuum, 2000), 95.

42. According to Schüssler Fiorenza, classical ideal forms of Greek and Roman kyriarchy have been the prevailing forms in the Western history of patriarchal democracy, and they provide the model for modern capitalist democracy. *But She Said*, 114–26.

43. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus*, 95. This differs somewhat from the use of kyriocentrism by Schottroff, who defines it as “society’s orientation in terms of the class of ruling men.” Luise Schottroff, *Lydia’s Impatient Sisters: A Feminist Social History of Early Christianity*, trans. Barbara and Martin Rumscheidt (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 231, n. 115; 34–36.

44. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus*, 97.

PATRIARCHAL GREEK DEMOCRACY

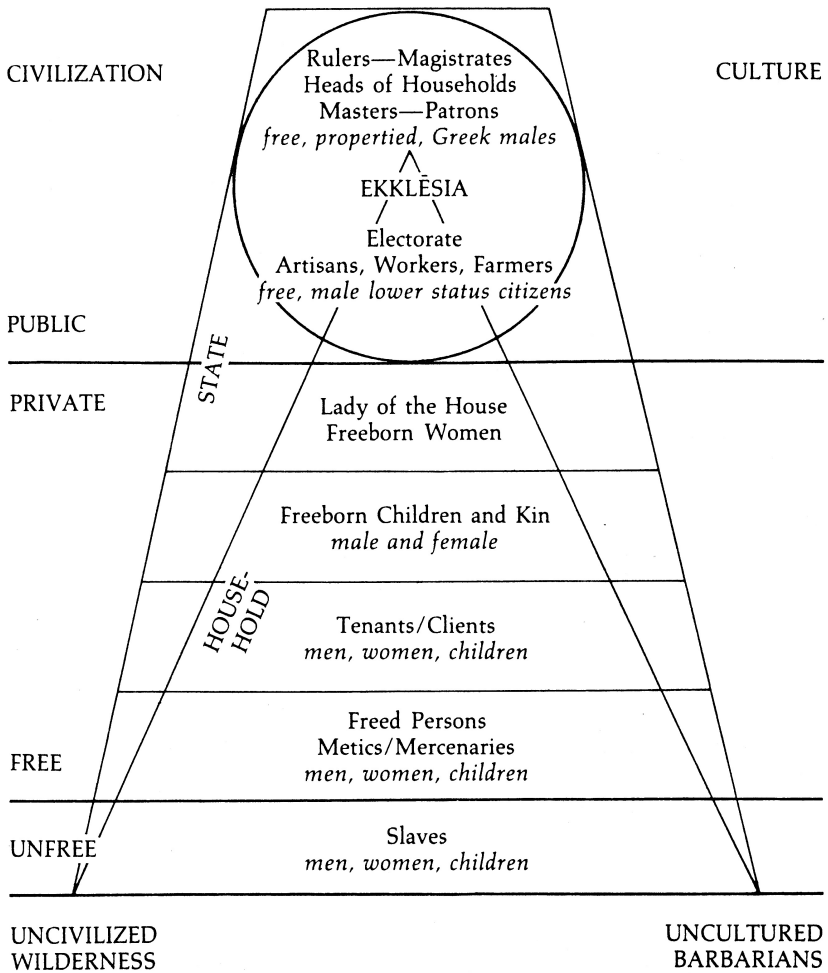


Figure 2. From “But She Said” by Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza.⁴⁵

45. *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation*. Copyright © 1992 by Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. Reprinted by permission of Beacon Press, Boston

As an analytical framework, kyriarchy provides a perspective and implies a series of questions. Historical analysis proceeds by inquiring about a source's relationship to kyriarchal structures and kyriocentric ideology. Setting texts in this framework improves previous methods by highlighting how the operation of gender works with the structures and ideologies associated with households, slavery, patronage, access to wealth, ethnicity, and legal and colonial status, and how all of these intertwine and overlap. If the goal of critical feminist theory is to help us move toward a more just society, its tools must center on political systems and networks. Since kyriarchy focuses on oppression, it adopts a perspective "from below" in order to illuminate systems of domination.

Socioeconomic analysis has received scant attention from feminist thinkers, and publications on the economy of the Roman Empire have been less than attentive to feminist concerns. The problem with this omission is that gender and socioeconomic status are interlocking systems of domination. For example, wealthy free women enjoyed a position of privilege that was not available to women who lived at or near subsistence level (90 percent of the population). Socioeconomic distinctions that reinscribe gender overlap with categories of class (or strata), colonial status, race, and ethnicity.⁴⁶ To fully appreciate ancient understandings of gender, and the position of women, we must undergird feminist analysis with socioeconomic analysis. A feminist position of political advocacy further requires naming socioeconomic deprivation as oppression and recognizing the system that sustains it as exploitative. Feminist materialist analysis involves investigation of all the systems that produce and are reproduced by socioeconomic oppression and exploitation. Feminist materialist analysis seeks to displace the ascriptions of difference (such as gender) that function in discrimination and exploitation.

Before elaborating further, I note the limits of the model: its shortcomings, and how its use could mislead. The pyramids of Alföldy, the Stegemanns, and Schüssler Fiorenza show stratifications or levels. This visual depiction should not obscure analysis of the dynamism of the relationships between different positions and the multiplicity of systems in operation. Furthermore, repeated references to a single model may give an impression of homogeneity that elides geographical difference, tensions between kyriocentric ideologies, and struggles within kyriarchal systems. The model is an intellectual tool designed to help us improve quality in analysis and understanding. Analysis of texts of

46. Kwok Pui-lan notes that socioeconomic analysis must include the ways gender has featured in relationships between colonizers and colonized. Kwok Pui-lan, "Mercy Amba Oduyoye and African Women's Theology," 8.

early Christianity would be enriched with attention to materialist dimensions, and kyriarchy is a useful framework for doing materialist analysis.

The pyramid model of kyriarchy of the Roman Empire depicts the hierarchy of socioeconomic benefits, that is, access to the basic means of livelihood. Pictorial depictions of the pyramid do not accurately reflect the quantitative dimensions of kyriarchy because the difference was so great between the top levels and the bottom.

Glenn Storey has conducted a quantitative analysis for different levels of socioeconomic status on the pyramid.⁴⁷ Based on figures derived from the situation in Italy, his evaluation of costs and benefits illustrates the degree to which elites derived their income from exploitation of laborers and farmers, free and slave. Freeborn Italian farmers and laborers in the city of Rome were dependent on state-sponsored handouts to obtain a subsistence-level food supply.⁴⁸ Slaves, whether manumitted or lifetime, produced enormous benefits for their owners.⁴⁹ In terms of cash value, a senator such as Pliny the Younger earned nearly 2,000 times as much as the average individual. Inequalities in the ownership of land, both agricultural and urban, were primarily responsible for the differentials. Storey's analysis is based on Alföldy's single-axis model and numbers drawn from sources in Italy, both rural and urban.

Steven Friesen has also contributed significantly to socioeconomic analysis of the eastern Mediterranean and to the refining of Alföldy's model. He proposes a model that he names a "poverty scale" to analyze access to wealth for inhabitants of cities.⁵⁰ This scale depicts seven degrees of access to economic goods ranging from imperial elites to beggars. Socioeconomic status was patterned in a sharply hierarchical structure, with about 90 percent of the population living at or near subsistence. The superwealthy elite comprised the top 3 percent, while another 7 percent (approximately) were successful merchants, or owners of small properties, which allowed them to have income from rents, or owners of skilled slaves who increased the profitability of owners' workshops. These merchants, landlords, and workshop owners belonged to the middle strata where subsistence was not an issue. Friesen's demarcations represent an improvement in precision from a two-tiered scale.⁵¹ Gradations in extreme wealth and poverty are more readily apparent in this model. Further,

47. Glenn R. Storey, "Cui Bono? An Economic Cost-Benefit Analysis of Statuses in the Roman Empire," in *Hierarchies in Action: Cui Bono?*, ed. Michael W. Diehl (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 340–74.

48. *Ibid.*, 356–59.

49. *Ibid.*, Table 17–11, p. 360.

50. Friesen, "Poverty in Pauline Studies."

the appearance of the middle group with some disposable property fits more precisely with evidence concerning small-scale traders and property owners.⁵²

Quantitative models of socioeconomic status by Storey and Friesen are especially significant for this study.⁵³ The range in wealth from top to bottom of the scale was enormous. The middle group that did have access to property were far removed from imperial elites yet they were still much wealthier than the majority 90 percent who hovered near subsistence level. With their relative wealth, members of the middle group could act as patrons for persons from the lower groups.

The hierarchy of socioeconomic stratification was sustained and reproduced by institutions and customs such as legal and property systems, the patron-client system, the occupational system, the institutions of slavery and marriage, and a variety of practices and ideologies of legitimization.⁵⁴ At least three main interrelated themes recur in kyriocentric ideologies and institutions legitimating imperial hierarchical rule: prosperity, paternalism, and peace or concord. The peace engendered by Roman military domination was praised as the basis for commerce and thus prosperity. Benevolent paternalism on the part of emperor and elite patrons ensured continuity and benefit for all. This decree by the “assembly of Greeks in Asia” in 9 B.C.E. praises imperial rule.

Whereas the providence which divinely ordered our lives created
with zeal and munificence the most perfect good for our lives by

51. Several studies depend on a model with just two socioeconomic levels, rich and poor: Justin J. Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998); Ivoni Richter Reimar and Linda M. Maloney, *Women in the Acts of the Apostles: A Feminist Liberation Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).

52. Jeremy Paterson, “Trade and Traders in the Roman World: Scale, Structure, and Organisation,” in *Trade, Traders and the Ancient City*, ed. Helen Parkins and Christopher Smith (London: Routledge, 1998), 149–67. Glenn R. Storey, “Roman Economies: A Paradigm of Their Own,” in *Archaeological Perspectives on Political Economies*, ed. Gary M. Feinman and Linda M. Nicholas (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2004), 105–28.

53. See also Walter Scheidel and Steven J. Friesen, “The Size of the Economy and the Distribution of Income in the Roman Empire,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 99 (2009): 61–91.

54. Peter Garnsey and Richard Saller, *The Roman Empire: Economy, Society and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 109–11. Hannelore Schröder, “The Economic Impoverishment of Mothers Is the Enrichment of Fathers,” in *Women, Work and Poverty*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Anne Carr (*Concilium*; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1987), 14. Schröder argues that feminist economists’ “analysis has to start with the domestic economy and the domestic dominance fixed by marriage-, family-, and inheritance laws. The historical process is indispensable, for economy begins in the home (oikos)” (13).