

Cambridge University Press
0521633109 - Christianity and Roman Society
Gillian Clark
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CHRISTIANITY AND ROMAN SOCIETY

Early Christianity in the context of Roman society raises important questions for historians, sociologists of religion and theologians alike. This work explores the differing perspectives arising from a changing social and academic culture. Key issues on early Christianity are addressed, such as how early Christian accounts of pagans, Jews and heretics can be challenged and the degree to which Christian groups offered support to their members and to those in need. The work examines how non-Christians reacted to the spectacle of martyrdom and to Christian reverence for relics. Questions are also raised on why some Christians encouraged others to abandon wealth, status and gender-roles for extreme ascetic lifestyles and on whether Christian preachers trained in classical culture offered moral education to all or only to the social elite. The interdisciplinary and thematic approach offers the student of early Christianity a comprehensive treatment of its role and influence in Roman society.

GILLIAN CLARK is Professor of Ancient History at the University of Bristol. She has written extensively on Christianity and classical culture and her previous publications include *Augustine: Confessions Books I–IV* (editor) (Cambridge University Press, 1995).

KEY THEMES IN ANCIENT HISTORY

EDITORS

P. A. Cartledge

Clare College, Cambridge

P. D. A. Garnsey

Jesus College, Cambridge

Key Themes in Ancient History aims to provide readable, informed and original studies of various basic topics, designed in the first instance for students and teachers of Classics and Ancient History, but also for those engaged in related disciplines. Each volume is devoted to a general theme in Greek, Roman, or, where appropriate, Graeco-Roman history, or to some salient aspect or aspects of it. Besides indicating the state of current research in the relevant area, authors seek to show how the theme is significant for our own as well as ancient culture and society. By providing books for courses that are oriented around themes it is hoped to encourage and stimulate promising new developments in teaching and research in ancient history.

Other books in the series

Death-ritual and social structure in classical antiquity, by Ian Morris

o 521 37465 0 (hardback), o 521 37611 4 (paperback)

Literacy and orality in ancient Greece, by Rosalind Thomas

o 521 37346 8 (hardback), o 521 37742 0 (paperback)

Slavery and society at Rome, by Keith Bradley

o 521 37287 9 (hardback), o 521 37887 7 (paperback)

Law, violence, and community in classical Athens, by David Cohen

o 521 38167 3 (hardback), o 521 38837 6 (paperback)

Public order in ancient Rome, by Wilfried Nippel

o 521 38327 7 (hardback), o 521 38749 3 (paperback)

Friendship in the classical world, by David Konstan

o 521 45402 6 (hardback), o 521 45998 2 (paperback)

Sport and society in ancient Greece, by Mark Golden

o 521 49698 5 (hardback), o 521 49790 6 (paperback)

Food and society in classical antiquity, by Peter Garnsey

o 521 64182 9 (hardback), o 521 64588 3 (paperback)

Cambridge University Press
0521633109 - Christianity and Roman Society
Gillian Clark
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Banking and business in the Roman world, by Jean Andrau
o 521 38031 6 (hardback), o 521 38932 1 (paperback)

Roman law in context, by David Johnston
o 521 63046 0 (hardback), o 521 63961 1 (paperback)

Religions of the ancient Greeks, by Simon Price
o 521 38201 7 (hardback), o 521 38867 8 (paperback)

Ancient Greece: using evidence, by Pamela Bradley
o 521 79646 6 (paperback)

Ancient Rome: using evidence, by Pamela Bradley
o 521 79391 2 (paperback)

Cambridge University Press
0521633109 - Christianity and Roman Society
Gillian Clark
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CHRISTIANITY AND ROMAN SOCIETY

GILLIAN CLARK



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press
0521633109 - Christianity and Roman Society
Gillian Clark
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge, CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa
<http://www.cambridge.org>

© Cambridge University Press 2004

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without
the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2004

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeface Adobe Garamond 11/12.5 pt. *System* L^AT_EX 2_ε [T_B]

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 0 521 63310 9 hardback
ISBN 0 521 63386 9 paperback

Cambridge University Press
0521633109 - Christianity and Roman Society
Gillian Clark
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

JCJM

emerito non otioso

Ars mea, multorum es quos saecula prisca tulerunt:
sed nova te brevitatis asserit esse meam.

Omnia cum veterum sint explorata libellis,
multa loqui breviter sit novitatis opus.

Te relegat iuvenis, quem garrula pagina terret,
aut si quem paucis seria nosse iuvat;
te longinqua petens comitem sibi ferre viator
ne dubitet, parvo pondere multa vehens.

(Cassiodorus, *De orthographia* 146, quoting Phocas)

This book's the work of many, but it's short,
And that is new and shows it to be mine.
What's new is putting briefly all that work.
Long books scare students: this is one for them,
And anyone who likes some serious thoughts
Concisely said. Long-distance travellers
Will find its content well above its weight.

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	<i>page xi</i>
1 Introduction	I
2 Christians and others	16
3 The blood of the martyrs	38
4 Body and soul	60
5 People of the Book	78
6 Triumph, disaster or adaptation?	93
<i>Bibliographical essay</i>	118
<i>References</i>	122
<i>Index</i>	134

Preface

This book draws on research, editorial work, and teaching at the universities of Liverpool and Bristol. It owes much to my first experience of Bristol teaching, shared with Neville Morley, in the academic year 2000/1. Our final-year seminar on 'Christianity and Roman society' included students for whom Christianity is an interesting aspect of the Roman empire and students for whom Christianity is a living faith. I am grateful to them all, for their intellectual curiosity, for the consideration they showed each other, and for making it clear that I had accepted too easily many things that need to be explained. The final draft benefited from another final-year seminar, in autumn 2003, shared this time with Richard Goodrich. The book attempts to outline some of the possible explanations for things that need to be explained, and to direct its readers to others. It is, of course, a snapshot of fast-moving scholarship, from one person's perspective, in a specific context of place and time. It is a book that could go on being written for years to come, as new information and new interpretations are published; but no doubt the series editors feel that it has gone on being written for quite long enough.

There is an immense range of published work, from different national and religious traditions, on the evidence for Roman, Jewish and Christian history and religion in the early centuries CE. I am a classical historian with a special interest in late antiquity, not a theologian or a New Testament specialist or a Judaist. As a member of the Church of England, I recognise how much diversity there is in even one Christian tradition. As a classicist I know Greek and Latin, but not Hebrew and Aramaic, Syriac and Coptic and Ethiopic, Georgian and Armenian and Old Slavonic, all of which are important for the history of Christianity in the world that was dominated by the Roman empire. I find the late fourth and early fifth centuries particularly interesting, because of the classically trained Christian bishops who tried to make their scriptures and their faith intelligible to anyone who would come to church and listen, and who used their skills of rhetoric and networking

Cambridge University Press
0521633109 - Christianity and Roman Society
Gillian Clark
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

xii

Preface

to help the poor. I do not have the expertise to take the story much further, but others are working on later Christian writings, on late antique Jewish texts, on the kingdoms that succeeded Rome in the early medieval West, and on the later history of Byzantium and its interactions with Islam. I have kept to Greek and Latin in the Roman empire and the first five centuries of Christianity, with much gratitude to those whose knowledge and understanding has helped to supply some of the gaps in my own. Debts to individuals are not forgotten, but really are too numerous to mention. I have consistently learned from co-editing, with Andrew Louth, the monograph series Oxford Early Christian Studies; from co-editing, with Mary Whitby and Mark Humphries, the late-antique series Translated Texts for Historians; from sharing in the Shifting Frontiers in Late Antiquity network started by Ralph Mathisen; and from reading the work of the doctoral students whose commitment in difficult times takes this subject forward. Peter Garnsey and Paul Cartledge, editors of Key Themes, showed impressive patience as bureaucratic demands disrupted the teaching and research of all British academics; they also made valuable comments on the final draft. I am responsible for the translations and for the remaining errors.

In writing this book, I have often remembered a student I taught twenty years ago, who had entered her religious order in Ireland before the reforms of the Second Vatican Council (1965). Appealed to on questions of doctrine or practice, she could usually find an answer; but sometimes she would gently shake her head and say 'It makes you wonder what can we have been thinking of.' We do, sometimes, make progress.

Bristol, Epiphany 2004