

2. A Battle of Equals?: Jesus and Agonistic Palestinian Society

Social-scientific Method

1. Observe social dynamics of contemporary societies, e.g. honour/shame, personality, kinship, marriage.
2. Develop an explanatory model.
3. Apply the model to early Christianity.

E.g 1. Group formation (forming, storming, norming, performing)

2. Network formation (in Mark there is little network, the Jesus movement is a reform movement).

Methodological Caution

1. Transferability
2. Applicability
3. Reductionism
4. Distance

Methodological Caution

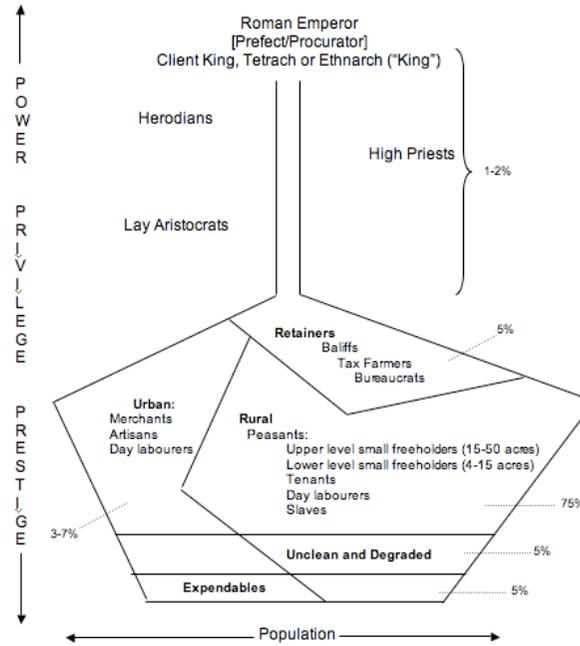
Methodological caution should be taken when applying models imported from other cultures and times. Herzog suggests a number of concerns:

1. With respect to the models used, how can models created by moderns interpret an ancient culture? In addition, there is the question of transferability. How can a model from one culture be used to predict the dynamics of another culture? Before all models are condemned, however, please note that every reader utilises contemporary models when reading Scripture. Self-consciousness of the limitations of one's own approach is thus required in order to avoid the reader unconsciously imposing implicit methods and models drawn from his or her own culture on the text.
2. The second problem is that of the incommensurability of the methods and the texts. The texts were not written to provide the information sought by social sciences. However, this simply illustrates the fact that all readers approach Scripture with a predetermined set of questions.
3. The third problem is one of reductionism. Some analyses reduce all theology to sociology or anthropology in disguise. Social forces are deemed the cause of specific theologies. Nevertheless, the early church was a social movement and may be described as such without eliminating the guidance and intervention of God.

This method distances the interpreter from the text and renders it an object to be analysed rather than Scripture that 'scrutinizes and searches the interpreter'. No interpreter is objective in that communication involves interaction between two subjects. Thus social scientific criticism cannot claim objectivity, but rather it may help to highlight the reader's own value system.

Palestinian Society

Richard L. Rohrbaugh, 'The Social Location of the Markan Audience,' in Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Gospel Interpretation: Narrative-Critical & Social Scientific Approaches* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press, 1997), 109.



Urban Elite in Mark

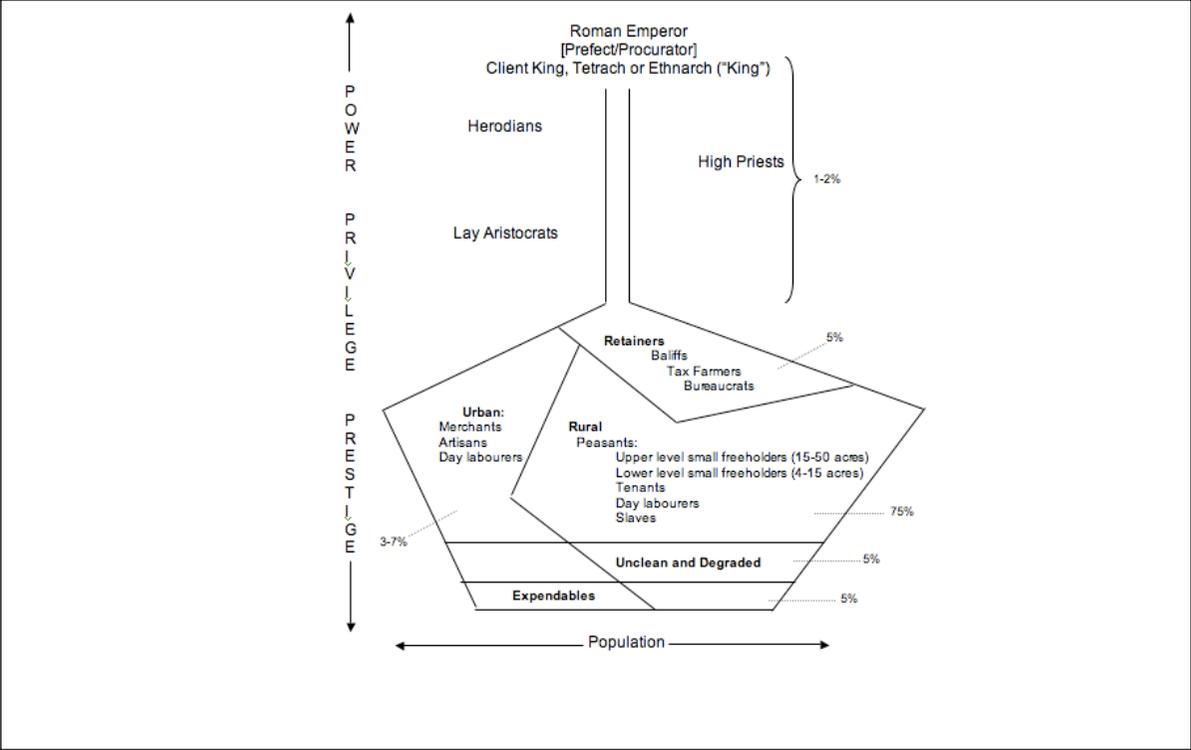
Caesar, 12:14, 17	Strong man, 3:27
Pontius Pilate, 15:2, 8, 15	Those who have, 4:25
Rulers of the gentiles, 10:42	Elders, 8:31; 11:27; 14:43, 53; 15:1
Herod, 6:14; 8:15	Rich man, 10:22
Herodias, 6:17	Wealthy, 10:23, 25
Herodias's daughter, 6:22	Vineyard owner and son, 12:1, 6
Philip, 6:17	Sadducees, 12:18
Governors, 13:9; 15:16	Family of seven brothers, 12:20
High Priest, 2:26; 14:47, 53, 54, 60, 61, 63, 66	Rich people, 12:41
Chief Priests, 8:31; 10:33; 11:18, 27; 14:1, 10, 43, 53, 55; 15:1, 3, 10, 11, 31	Kings 13:9
Scribes, 1:22; 2:6, 16; 3:22; 7:1, 5; 8:31; 9:11, 14; 10:33; 11:18, 27; 12:28, 35, 38; 14:1, 43, 53; 15:1, 31	Man going on a journey, 13:34
	Owner of upper room, 14:14
	Joseph of Arimathea, 15:43
	Jairus and his family, 5:22, 23, 40

The urban elite made up about 2 percent of the population. They included the highest-ranking military officers, priestly families, the Herodians and other aristocratic families. They would have lived in fortified areas of the cities where access was restricted. Such individuals would have enjoyed high levels of literacy.

These groups, along with their retainers, controlled writing, coinage, taxation, the military and judicial systems. The religious education system legitimised those in power. In terms of family structures these groups would have produced large extended families (cf. Herod's family) in contrast with poor segments of society which had lower survival rates.

The source of their power derived from land ownership and taxation. 1-3 percent of the population owned the majority of the land. During the time of the Herodians ownership was increasingly concentrated in fewer hands as peasants' land was transferred into the control of powerful families.

Rohrbaugh suggests that all of the opponents of Jesus come from this group or from their retainers. In order to justify this statement he includes the Pharisees as retainers, a move that may not be justified. Despite this, his basic observation holds that the major conflict is to be found between Jesus and this group. Jesus, for example, warns against the scribes (12:38-40). Rohrbaugh equates the traditions of the elders with the ruling elite (7:1-23; p. 111). This ignores the fact that such traditions pertained to the Pharisees rather than the Sadducees and reflects significant differences in approach. This should not be taken as a universal phenomenon in that many in this group (e.g. Joseph, Jairus) respond positively.



Retainers in Mark

Pharisees, 2:16, 18, 24; 3:6;
7:1, 3, 5; 8:11, 15; 10:2;
12:13

People from Jairus' house,
5:35

Men arresting John the
Baptist, 6:17

Soldier of the guard, 6:27

Levi, 2:14

Those selling in the temple,
11:15

Servant-girl of the High Priest,
14:66

Crowd sent from Chief

Priests, scribes, and elders,
14:42

Physicians, 2:17; 5:26

Galilean priest, 1:44

Courtiers, officers, 6:21

Judas Iscariot, 14:11

Tax collectors, 2:15, 16

Money changers, 11:15

Doorkeepers, 13:34

Soldiers, 15:16

Centurion, 15:39

Slave/servant, 1:20; 9:35;

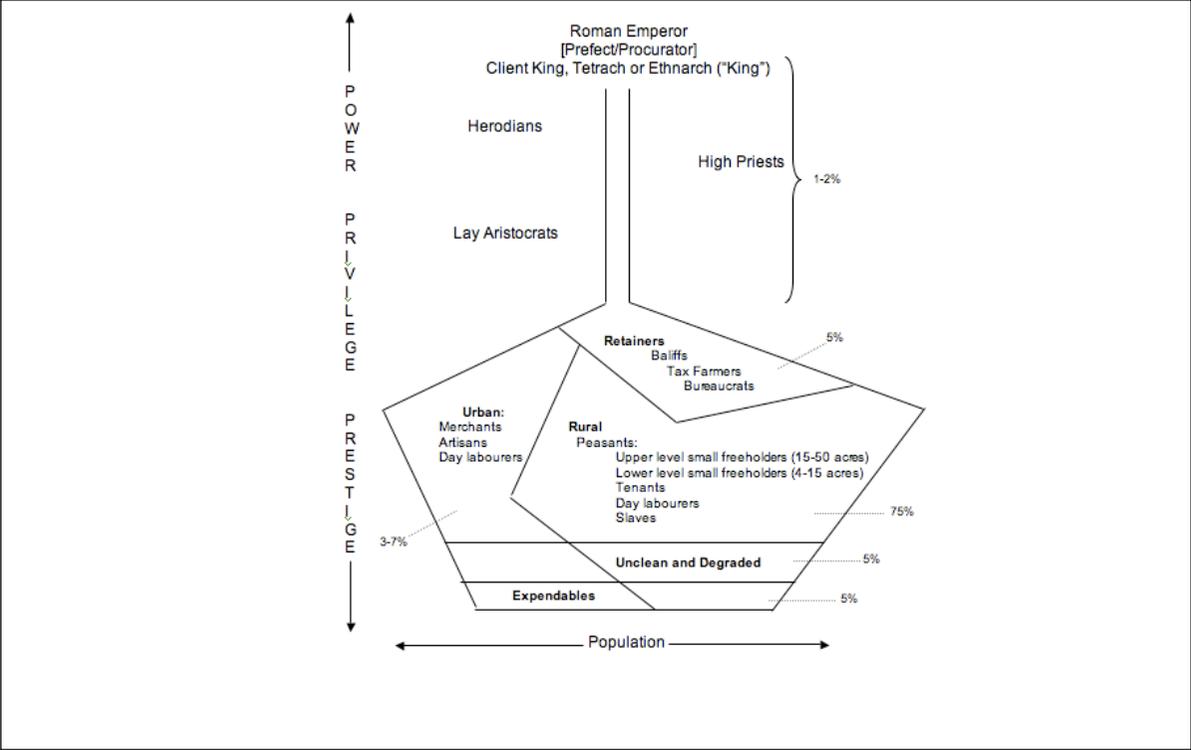
10:43, 44; 12:2, 4; 13:34;

14:47

This group includes the lower echelons of the elite down towards nonelite levels that include those who worked in the service of the elite. Through their influence the control of the elite was extended through non-elite sections of society. Retainers depended for the position on their relationship with the urban elite.

The Pharisees are also the chief opponents of Jesus, competing with him for influence (honour) among the non-elite. While they associate with the scribes (2:13-17; 7:1-23) and Herodians (3:1-6; 8:15; 12:13-17) in the end they do not prove to be Jesus' main opponents. Rohrbaugh suggests that:

Most likely, they were literate local village leaders (in Mark, contra Josephus, the Pharisees are in Jerusalem only in 12:13) who depend on the elite for their livelihood and operated as brokers between the nonelite and the upper echelons of society. From that position they joined in with all of Jesus' elite opponents to form a united front.



Urban Non-elite in Mark

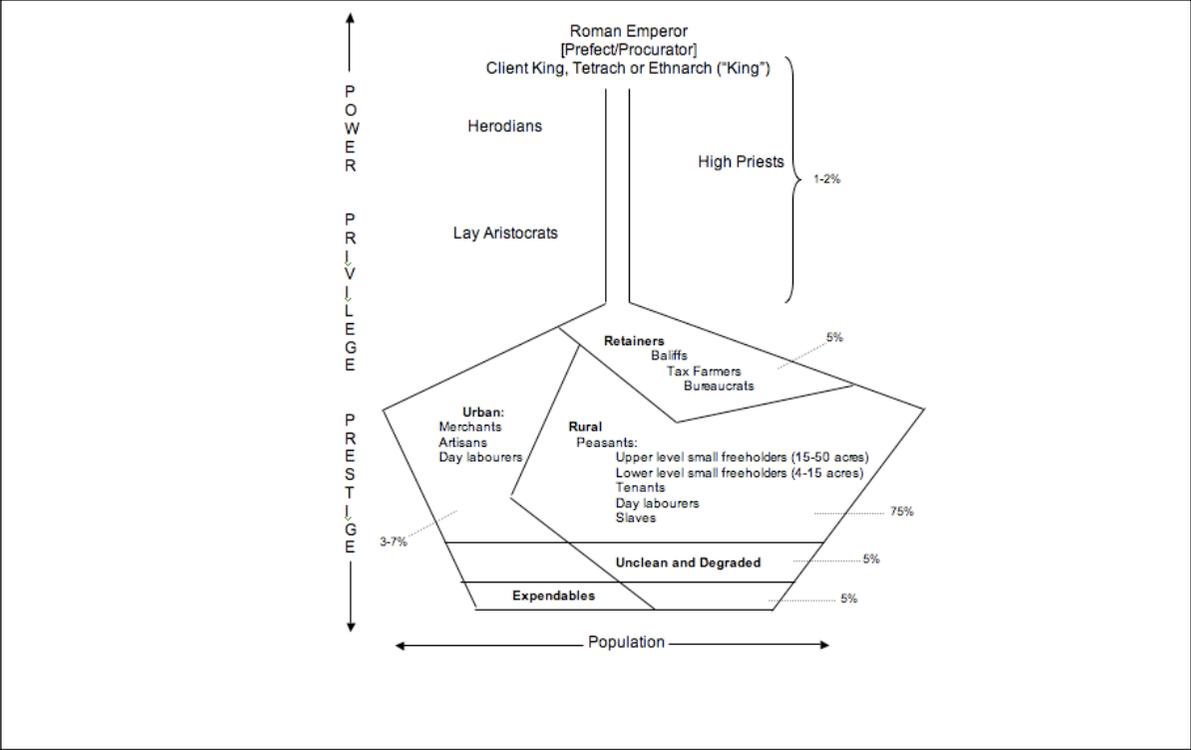
Those buying in the temple (likely includes peasants), 11:15

Crowd/people, 1:5; 11:18, 32; 12:12, 37, 41; 14:2, 43: 15:8, 11, 15

Widow, 12:42

In Mark there are references to urban non-elite. This group would have included merchants, artisans, labourers, and service workers. In most agrarians societies this segment of society represents between 5 to 8 percent of the population. Some in this group would be extremely poor, while other groups, such as merchants, would be extremely rich. Regardless of wealth, the urban nonelite had little social, cultural or political influence.

Most of the urban poor would have lived in segregated areas on the edge of the city. They often formed trade associations in order to aid economic survival. Their diet was often worse than the rural poor resulting in a shorter lifespan. Rohrbaugh suggests that a child born in Rome in this class had a life expectancy of only twenty years.



Degraded, Unclean and Expendables in Mark

Man with an unclean spirit,
1:23

The sick and demon-
possessed, 1:32-34, 39; 6:9,
13, 55; 9:38

Leper, 1:40

Paralytic, 2:3

Man with withered hand, 3:1

Those who have nothing, 4:25

Demoniac, 5:2

Hemorrhaging woman, 5:25

Syro-Phoenician woman and
daughter, 7:25, 26

Deaf man with speech
impediment, 7:23 (v. 32)

Blind man, 8:22

Boy with an unclean spirit,
9:14

Blind Bartimaeus, 10:46

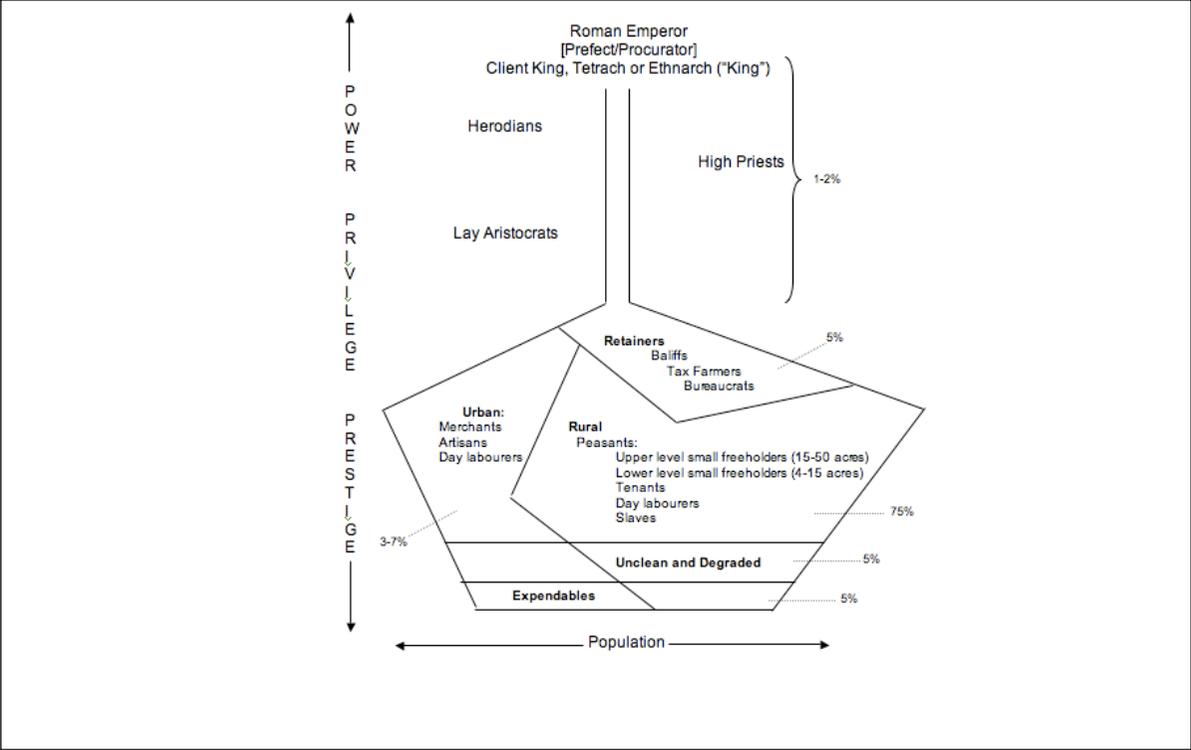
Simon the leper, 14:3

Swineherds, 5:14

Man carrying a jar, 14:13

Outside cities and villages dwelt the degraded, unclean, and expendables (beggars, low-status prostitutes, poor day labourers, tanners – due to their smell). This group was most numerous around the cities, where they were locked out at night. In rural areas they would have lived along the hedgerows. They were not a large proportion of society, probably about 10 percent. In Mark they appear more frequently than their size in the population would justify.

It is not clear as to whether the man carrying the jar should be included in this group. During water shortages individuals would bring water into the city and sell it on the streets.



Rural Peasants and Other Villagers in Mark

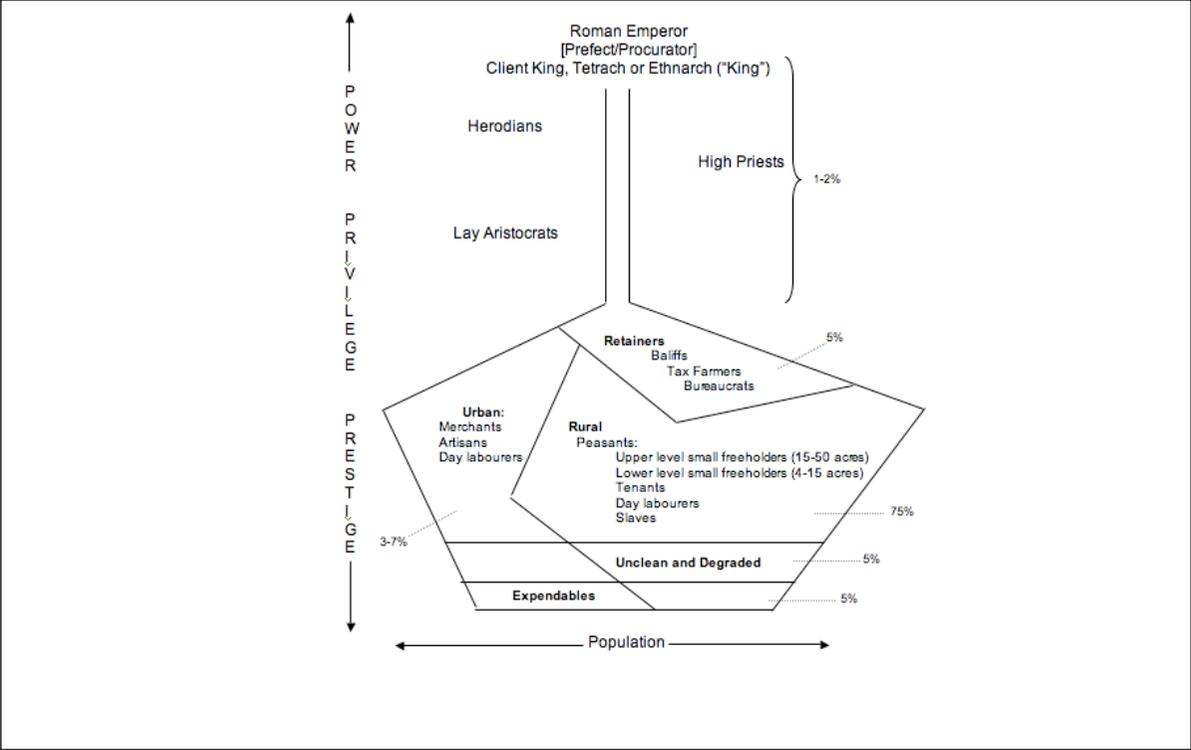
Jesus, <i>passim</i>	Little ones, 9:42
Those from the Judean countryside, 1:5	Children, 10:13
James, John, Zebedee, 1:19-20	Bystanders in Bethphage, 11:5
Simon's mother-in-law, 1:30	Those buying in the temple (likely included urban poor as well), 11:15
Sower, 4:3	Tenants, 12:1
Seed scatterer, 4:26	Simon of Cyrene, 15:21
Mary, 6:3	Crowd, 2:4, 13; 3:9, 20, 32; 4:1, 36; 5:21, 24, 27, 30, 31; 6:14, 17, 34, 39, 45; 7:14, 17, 33; 8:1, 2, 6, 34; 9:14, 15, 17, 25; 10:1, 46
James, Joses, Judas, Simon, and Jesus' sisters, 6:3	
Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Joses, Salome, 15:40	

In agrarian societies the cities dominate the social, political and economic life. However, 90 percent of the population lived in rural areas. They may be divided into three groups:

Freeholders: It is debated as to how much of the land in Galilee was held by freeholders. Some estimate up to half the land. This group would have experienced an unstable existence as they were prone to debt and the loss of their land. They would have a taxation rate of between 15 to 50 percent, to fund the temple, priesthood, Herod's regime, and the Romans. Such farms gradually disappeared prior to the NT period. Peasants moved to villages or towns from where they would go to the fields. Rohrbaugh suggests that in NT times there was a shift from farm-based extended families to village/town-based nuclear families.

Tenants, Day Labourers, and Slaves: There is good evidence that prior to the 66-70 AD war large portions of arable land were in the ownership of large estate owners. Tenants farmers would have rented land, paying anywhere between 1/3rd to 2/3rds of the value of their crop, either in money or in crops. Often they were former freeholders who had got into debt.

Other Rural Groups: Many other professions were based in rural areas, from artisans, to low level aristocracy, fishermen and herders. Those who moved around would have been viewed as deviant by villagers. For example, shepherds were looked down upon as their sheep often ranged freely onto the crops of farmers. These groups were the largest in ancient society and are the most prominent in Mark.



Relevance for Mark?

1. The various groups in the urban elite coalesce to remove the threat of Jesus:

In Mark's passion narrative, Jesus' conflict with the elite intensifies as the scribes and Pharisees link up with the elders (non-priests by birth) and chief priests. The latter are clearly the most powerful members of the Jewish aristocracy, and their struggle with Jesus is primarily one for political influence over the non-elite (11:18).

Rohrbaugh, 'Social Location', 111.

2. The majority of those who follow Jesus are from the retainer and rural peasant sections of society. Jesus was himself an artisan.

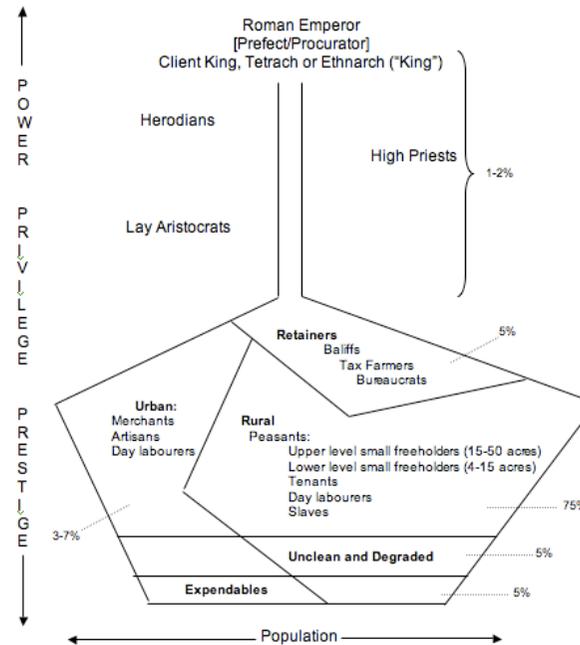
3. There are many references to retainers. This is because the majority of Jesus' ministry is set in Galilee and the retainers were located in rural areas, extending elite control.

4. The urban poor play a very minor role within the gospel as Jesus' ministry is mostly located in Galilee (cf. the widow in 12:42, and the crowd in 15:11).

5. The crowd is referred to thirty-eight times, reflecting the fact that the rural peasants were the largest group in society.

Patron-Client Relationships

1. To survive one needed the protection of a patron.
2. The patron would bestow favour, you would defend his/her reputation and respond to their wishes.
3. The patron of the empire was the emperor himself (followed by his wife).
4. Who is the patron of Jesus? Who are his clients?



Greco-Roman society was strictly hierarchical, you needed a patron, who would favour you, you were then his client, and had to protect his reputation and respond when called. Thus, Pilate was the client of the emperor, his patron, and his sole aim was to keep his patron happy. Jesus is the client of his patron, the Father.

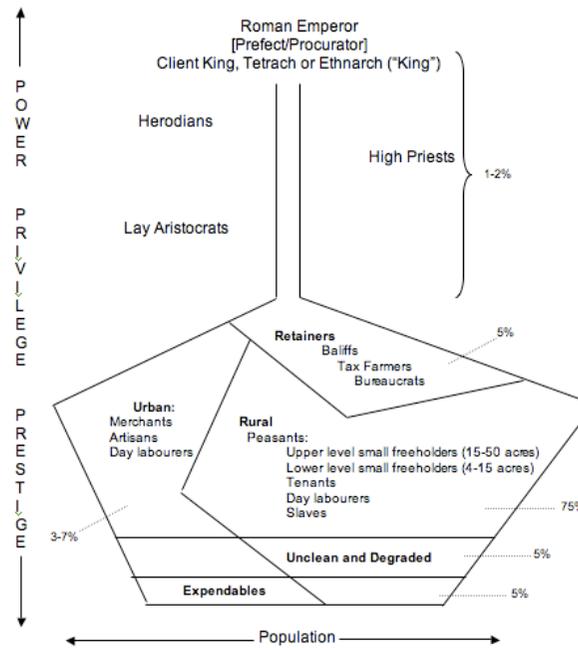
The Pharisees join with the urban elite, in a patron-client relationship, to remove Jesus.

Honour-Shame

1. Increasing honour is the means of advancing status.

2. You can increase your honour through finding a good patron or by challenging someone of equal standing, such as Jesus v. Pharisees (hence an agonistic culture).

3. You do not respond to challenges from those below you (chief priests to Jesus), as this is shaming.



The greatest commodity one could accumulate was honour (bear in mind that ancients believed there was a finite amount of finance available - limited resources). To progress, you

Reading Mark in light of this analysis.

Mark 4

Mark 12:1-12

Mark 10:35-45

Mark 13:34-37

