Voluntary Associations in the Graeco-Roman World - John S. Kloppenborg, Stephen G. Wilson

Provides a lot of insights related to question 1, but will not be helpful for the other questions. The authors are mostly interested in how collegia and other associations functioned on an institutional level and how they were related to the state. The last three chapters are strictly interested in synagogues and Jewish communities in Roman Judea and Alexandria and make sure to only mention early Christian communities in relation to Jewish reactions.

Structurally, this is a compilation of 14 essays by different authors that each provide insights into methodology and terminology as it is used in the field.

Chapter 1- Voluntary Associations: An Overview – S.G. Wilson

* Defines voluntary associations as groups organized to further the interests of its members or to lobby, transform and resist the state.
* Author finds that early synagogues and churches, as shown in official communications between community and state, used similar terminology to ‘pagan’ and vocational associations.
* Churches existed to protect the privileges of its members. The aim of Churches was not,” Wilson claims, “to overthrow governments, but to find their niche in them.” (Wilson 4)
* Early Christian writers called on followers to support state (unlike some philosophical schools)
* Sometimes churches and Christian communities were ‘theoretically exclusive but practically fluid’ (13)
* Associations in general generally acted locally with limited trans-local interactions
* The role of women changes regionally and temporally
* Makes a claim for the study of early Christian communities in relation to non-Christian communities and associations around them.

Chapter 2- Collegia and Thiasoi – John S. Kloppenborg

* Kloppenborg is more interested in professional and funerary associations
* Discusses early Christian collegia specifically as funerary organizatons
* Discusses likelihood of early Christian churches starting as household associations. (1 patron, for his *oikos*/household with hierarchies, officially recognized by the state, allowed to convene for special events, open to freedmen and slaves)
* Professional associations usually centered around a pagan deity, but sometimes included Christian members

Chapter 3- Philosophiai: Graeco-Roman, Judean and Christian – Steve Mason

* Concerned with the structure of philosophical schools from around 0 – 200CE
* Schools of philosophy (even when targeted by the state) have heightened prestige compared to cults
* Mason makes a claim that early Christian writers and slightly later writers (150CE and beyond) attempted to make a case to see Jesus as a philosopher.
* Evidence to suggest that outsiders sometimes saw early churches and synagagues as schools because communities convened there specifically to study and not to feast and hold banquets.
* When Mason says early Christian writers he is usually referring to Luke.

Chapter 4- Ekklesia and Voluntary Associations – Wayne O. McCready

* By the middle of the third century CE the Christian ‘movement’ had achieved an effective religious definition with established religious practices and a conceptual base there were comprehensive and of sufficient substance that they accommodated diversity and dissent without compromising normative principles of religion.
* At this point you notice that the book is specifically interested in Pauline Christianity and not so much Christianity as a whole
* Churches were probably more trans-local than most associations
* Christian ekklesia – assemblies of Jesus’ people with a common viewpoint on election.
* Provides a very in depth discussion, from the creation of the earliest ekklesia to around 250CE, about the institutional structures and the networks (local and trans-local) of early Christian communal assemblies.
* McCready is very quick to warn of comparisons to synagogues and any genealogical conclusions about the origins of Christian churches and schools therefrom.

Chapter 5- The Collegia and Roman Law

* Detailed legal history of collegia in rome
* Their legal status not “temporally uniform”
* Christian groups might have pretended to be Jewish for a while. At least for legal purposes

Chapter 6, 7 focus specifically on very early jewish synagauges

Chapter 8:

* As with the Cairo-Damascus Document, early Christian and Jewish groups might have been more similar to pagan counterparts in nomenclature rather than function
* Christian groups might have adopted pre-Christian terminology and structure

Chapter 9: Harold Remus

* Not really directly related to the research
* Shows how network analysis can be used to deduce the reach and function of certain associations. Very in depth methodologically
* Has something in the end about Christian pressures to be allowed to practice with in the Asclepieion in Pergamum which might be more interesting as a phenomenon of Christian/non-Christian interaction

Chapter 10 – specifically about non-Christian Mithras cult

Chapter 11 – Hudson McLean

* Very interesting discussion about Churches in Delos drawing on ‘pagan’ and ‘cultic’ architecture and practice in their earliest iterations

Chapter 12,13,14 not relevant

* Discuss gender roles in early synagogues
* Architecture of synagogues
* What is interesting here, combined with the De Bruyne paper, is a matter of nomenclature and the fluidity alluded to in the rest of this book. When speaking of some of these synagogues and Jewish communities it is not always clear that we are talking about people that would have seen themselves exclusively as “Jews” or “not-Christian.” When read next to chapter 5 one might find some clues to early Christian organizations in Jewish institutions/communities.

Overall the book mainly addresses only the first question on this list