

Chapter 1

Greco-Roman Philosophic, Religious, and Voluntary Associations

Richard S. Ascough

A “group” is generally defined as a collection of persons with a feeling of common identity, goals, and norms. For example, slaves working the Roman mines in Spain had—whether they liked it or not—a common social identity (slave), a common goal (mining), and shared norms of behavior (work or be punished). “Associations,” however, are more formal than groups. Associations are composed of persons who not only share common interests and activities but also have deliberately organized for some specific purpose or purposes. As such, associations have established rules of organization and procedure and established patterns of leadership.

Associations can be divided into two basic categories: involuntary and voluntary. Involuntary associations have a membership based on birth or compulsion. This was generally the case with the *demes* and *phratries* of ancient Athens. It is also true of a conscripted army. Voluntary associations, however, are formed by persons who freely and deliberately choose to join and who can likewise choose to resign. Examples would be a guild of actors or a gathering of Isis-worshippers.

Voluntary associations in the Greco-Roman world have a long history, going back at least to the laws of Solon in sixth-century B.C.E. Athens. Such associations continued to grow through the classical period and were flourishing in the Hellenistic period. During the first century C.E. their presence was felt throughout the entire Roman Empire in cities and villages alike—although, of course, there is considerably more attestation for associations in urban centers than in rural areas. A variety of extant sources attest to various voluntary associations in antiquity. These include literary texts, papyri, inscriptions, and archaeological remains. All of these sources are important in an investigation of community-formation in Greco-Roman associations.

This chapter will focus on three types of associations in the Greco-Roman world: (1) philosophical associations, which are sometimes called philosophical

schools; (2) public religious associations, which are often called “mystery religions”; and (3) private religious and professional associations, which are usually referred to more generically as “voluntary” associations.

1. PHILOSOPHICAL ASSOCIATIONS

The word “school” can mean different things in different contexts. When applied to philosophical thought in antiquity it generally refers to persons who follow the same founder and propagate similar ideas and doctrines. Schools in this sense generally had as their goal the creation of a pathway to human flourishing. In so doing they focused on intellectual discourse and followed a particular way of life. Philosophical schools, however, were not always “groups” in terms of a sociological definition. That is, members of a school may be considered to be those who held related ideas, but these same persons may not—and generally did not—meet together as a group of one sort or another.

Our focus here, however, is not on the varying ideas of the many philosophical schools of antiquity, such as the Platonists, the Aristotelians, the Stoics, the Epicureans, the Pythagoreans, the Cynics, or the Sceptics. Rather, we want to focus attention on how philosophical associations were organized. In so doing, however, we run into a problem concerning our sources: most of the extant sources for the philosophical schools are interested in their ideas and founders, not in the form and organization of the schools themselves.

Alan Culpepper has set out some of the characteristics that were shared by a number of the philosophical schools of antiquity:

- (1) they were groups of disciples which usually emphasized *philia* and *koinonia*; (2) they gathered around, and traced their origins to, a founder whom they regarded as an exemplary, wise, or good man; (3) they valued the teachings of their founder and the traditions about him; (4) members of the schools were disciples or students of the founder; (5) teaching, learning, studying, and writing were common activities; (6) most schools observed communal meals, often in memory of their founders; (7) they had rules or practices regarding admission, retention of membership, and advancement within the membership; (8) they often maintained some degree of distance or withdrawal from the rest of society; and (9) they developed organizational means of insuring their perpetuity. (*Johannine School*, 258–59)

Furthermore, Culpepper notes that the organizational complexity of a school was usually tied to its understanding of the role of fellowship (*koinōnia*): “The more a school emphasized ‘fellowship’ the more likely it was to have a developed, structured organization and rules governing its communal life” (*ibid.*, 254).

If we focus our attention on philosophical schools for which evidence from around the first century C.E. indicates that members formed themselves into associations, we are really limited to two particular groups—the Pythagoreans and the Epicureans, with less evidence for the former than the latter. The Epicureans, in fact, are the only group for which we have direct first-century evidence. The

Pythagorean school, however, probably influenced the organization of the other philosophical schools in antiquity and so also deserves attention.

The Pythagorean School

During the sixth century B.C.E., Pythagoras (d. ca. 497 B.C.E.) founded a closely knit school at Croton in southern Italy in which he emphasized asceticism and ritual purity, with a focus on the deliverance of the soul. It is difficult to determine the exact organizational structure of the Pythagorean school, for membership in it required secrecy and many of its traditions were passed on by memory alone. Those writers who do discuss the school's structure, such as Diogenes Laertius, Porphyry, and Iamblichus, are late in date (all third to fourth century C.E.) and somewhat unreliable. It is even unclear whether Pythagoras himself actually intended to found a school at all, since "Pythagoreanism was more of a way of life than a philosophy" (Culpepper, *Johannine School*, 247, 249).

Nonetheless, the Pythagorean school welcomed candidates for membership. Pythagoras's preaching attracted some adherents by calling people away from a life of luxury to a life of simplicity. According to one report, which may very well have been inflated, two thousand men, plus their wives and children, did not return home after hearing Pythagoras, but pooled their property and built an auditorium (*homakoion*) as large as a city (Iamblichus, *Life of Pythagoras* 6, citing Nicomachus). Other sources, however, suggest that the school was composed mostly of young, aristocratic men, some of whom were hand-picked by Pythagoras himself. These aristocratic connections provide the most likely reason for the school's political connections as well as for the fact that conflicts seem to have sometimes been a part of the school's life.

A description of the initiation procedure into the Pythagorean school can be found in a number of sources, particularly in Iamblichus, *Life of Pythagoras* 17—although, again, these descriptions may be only later, apocryphal reconstructions. According to our sources, initiation into the school began with a scrutiny of the devotees' family background, their way of life (e.g., leisure time, joys, disappointments), their physique, and their gait. They were then ignored for three years as a means of testing the strength of their desire to learn. Should they pass this testing period, they entered a five-year novitiate during which time they could not speak. At the end of this period, those who were approved underwent rites of purification and were initiated into the association. For those who were rejected, however, a tomb was raised as if they were dead. And if in the future a Pythagorean encountered those rejected, they were treated as if they were strangers.

Once membership was attained, the candidates became disciples (*mathētai*) and were considered to be members of the fellowship (*koinōnia*) or school (*scholē*). According to Diogenes Laertius, Pythagoras "was the first to say 'Friends have all things in common' and 'Friendship is equality'; indeed, his disciples put all their possessions into one common stock" (8.10, citing Timaeus). This communal practice may have been short-lived or only applicable to an inner group.

But when the policy was operative, property was submitted at the beginning of the five-year silent probationary period. If after five years as a novitiate a candidate was rejected, double the amount contributed was returned; if the candidate was accepted, the property was held in common by the community.

Pythagorean communal life was structured around an ordered daily schedule and included common meals. Restrictions were placed on the members' diet (no beans or meat, only uncooked food), their drink (pure water alone), their clothing (no wool), and certain materials (e.g., cypress could not be used in coffins). It is difficult to know all that occurred in the community, simply because the traditions of the school were to be kept secret and those who violated this code were punished or expelled. Control rested with Pythagoras when he was living or his successor after his death. Leadership was passed on through election or by appointment made by the previous leader, with leadership positions being held for life.

The Pythagoreans memorized the teachings of their founder and were in some ways more interested in commitment to the person and principles of Pythagoras than in acquiring knowledge. Nonetheless, they also studied Homer and perhaps some science and mathematics, and they probably used music for edification. Members were divided into two ranks: the students (*mathēmatikoi*), who received the full teachings and participated in debate, and the hearers (*akousmatikoi*), who were given only a summary (Iamblichus, *Life of Pythagoras* 18). Although Iamblichus notes that both of these two groups were recognized as Pythagoreans, those designated students looked down on the so-called hearers as not having received their instruction directly from Pythagoras.

Daily life in the Pythagorean school was fairly routine. Iamblichus describes a typical day of the members, although his description seems to apply most directly to those not living in the community and so probably reflects a later form of the school. Upon waking they took a lonely morning walk and then met together for discussion. Following some exercise they had breakfast of bread and honey. The afternoon was spent fulfilling civic obligations, although in the late afternoon they took another walk—this time in pairs or threesomes in order to review their disciplines. After a bath they met for a meal that began with libations and the burning of incense. Eating ceased before sunset and the meal was closed with libations and a public reading. Moral admonishments concluded the evening before members went to bed (cf. *Life of Pythagoras* 21). Whatever the date of this description, it gives us a sense of the lifestyle of the Pythagoreans generally. And it is not difficult to see how such a regime might have occurred in a communal setting, with instruction replacing political activities in the afternoon.

At the end of the fourth century B.C.E. the Pythagorean school had all but disappeared. There is little evidence for it until the first century B.C.E. at Rome, where Neo-Pythagoreanism continued the traditions of Pythagoras and venerated his name. Eventually, however, both classical Pythagoreanism and Neo-Pythagoreanism were subsumed by Neo-Platonism in the second century C.E.

The Epicurean Garden

Epicurus (ca. 341–271 B.C.E.) formed his Garden in Athens during the later part of the fourth century to the early third century B.C.E. Sources for understanding this community are better than for many of the other philosophical schools, since Epicurus himself wrote much and some of what he wrote survives. Other extant reports about Epicurus, though less reliable, can help round out our picture of the organization of the Epicurean school—particularly those by Diogenes Laertius, Cicero, and Plutarch.

Epicurus is usually considered to be the first to have intentionally set out to form a philosophical association. Born on the island of Samos, a citizen of Athens by birth, and having studied at Athens as a youth, he returned to Athens in 306 B.C.E. As an Athenian citizen he was able to purchase both a house and adjacent land for a garden outside the city wall, and it is at his house and garden, rather than the gymnasium, that he established his school. Members lived together in the house and pursued their daily regime in the garden. And although the Epicurean community withdrew from the world to seek a better way of life, it is probable that the house and garden was located within a densely populated, busy quarter of Athens. As such, the school was not particularly well secluded, and the withdrawal of its members from public life led, at times, to disfavor among the general population.

Epicurus's Garden "placed more emphasis on community and friendship than any other philosophical school" (Culpepper, *Johannine School*, 101). Epicurean associations were formed as fictional kinship groups and based on a household model. The goal was friendship, and the Epicureans sought to produce love and intimacy among all members. Cicero (106–43 B.C.E.), the Roman orator, philosopher, and statesman, writing in the first century B.C.E., records that "in just one household—and a small one at that—Epicurus assembled such large congregations of friends which were bound together by a shared feeling of the deepest love. And even now the Epicureans do the same thing" (*On Goals* 1.65).

Eusebius, the fourth-century Christian apologist, church historian, and bishop of Caesarea in Palestine from 313 until his death in 339, cites Numenius as saying: "The school of Epicurus resembles a true commonwealth (*politeia*), altogether free of factionalism, sharing one mind and one disposition, of which they were and are and, it appears, will be followers" (*Praep. ev.* 14.5). Such a close relationship among its members contributed to the overall success of Epicureanism. Nevertheless, goods were not held in common, for Epicurus considered such a practice to imply mistrust. Rather, the simple lifestyle of the Epicureans was supported by wealthier members and adherents through patronage. At the same time, Epicurean associations outside of Athens paid some form of dues to the Athenian Garden.

The Epicurean schools were dominated by their founder, who provided them with an organizational model and practical wisdom. In some respects, Epicureanism was closer to a "sect" or "cult" than a philosophical association, for not only were Epicurus's teachings held in high esteem but he himself was

venerated as “father” and “the wise one” by his followers. Seneca (ca. 4 B.C.E.–65 C.E.), the Roman philosopher, tells us that an oath of allegiance to Epicurus was taken by his disciples and suggests that his teachings were followed with vigor: “We will be obedient to Epicurus, according to whom we have made it our choice to live” (*Epistles* 25.5). The Epicureans met for a banquet once a month in honor of their founder and his early disciple, Metrodorus. After Epicurus’s death, regular funeral offerings were undertaken for him and his family, and a celebration was made on his birthday. By the first century C.E., it appears, Epicurus was worshiped as “a god who had revealed wisdom” (Culpepper, *Johannine School*, 109; cf. DeWitt, *Epicurus and His Philosophy*, 97–101).

There is some debate over the nature of leadership among the Epicureans. While there was no official leadership structure, there seems to have been a hierarchy of leadership based largely on the level of attainment in the philosophy of Epicurus. Epicurus, or his successor, held the highest place of honor as “the wise one.” Below were “associate leaders” (*kathēgēmōnes*), who were called “philosophers.” These were followed by “assistant leaders” (*kathēgetai*) or “instructors,” who each had a group of students over whom they were responsible. A distinction was made between advanced students (*synētheis*) and novices (*kataskēuazomenoi*). Once admitted to the association, a novice was taught full submission to the instructor. Each member was trained to respect and obey the person who was more advanced. “On this principle,” as Norman DeWitt observes, “one member could be said to be better than another only so far as he had made more progress” (*Epicurus and His Philosophy*, 100). But all members, especially younger members, were subject to admonition and reproof from one another, and all were expected to accept it willingly and learn from the correction. Furthermore, once admitted into the association a person was warned against all other forms of knowledge—such as music, rhetoric, or geometry—which were thought to interfere with the pursuit of happiness.

A clear distinction was made between “friends” (*philoī*) or associate members of the group and those who were “devotees” (*gnōrimoi*) or part of the inner circle close to Epicurus or his successors. Membership included both males and females, whether slaves or free. The presence of women is suggestive of the pleasure-seeking goal that formed part of Epicurus’s philosophy. There is, however, some evidence that these women were full participants in the lifestyle and teachings of the school. And slaves probably worked as secretaries and copyists for the large-scale publishing endeavors of Epicurus and his followers.

Epicureanism is considered a missionary movement, for Epicurean centers were established throughout the Mediterranean world and attracted many adherents. Epicurus himself maintained contact with these various centers through his letters to them, although none of these letters are extant. Along with his maxims, he also wrote principles of conduct for his followers in various locations as well as summaries of his teaching. Yet, despite the presence of such groups throughout the Mediterranean world, little is known about Epicureanism beyond the Garden in Athens. The house and garden were still operative in the first century B.C.E., but much in need of repair. The movement finally died out in the second century C.E.

2. PUBLIC RELIGIOUS ASSOCIATIONS

When discussing “religious associations” the primary focus is usually on the ancient mysteries, which are often misnamed “mystery religions.” Walter Burkert distinguishes three types of organization around the ancient mysteries: (1) the itinerant practitioner; (2) the sanctuary; and (3) the association of worshippers (*Ancient Mystery Cults*, 31). In the case of the itinerant, “there was no backing by a corporation or community” (*ibid.*, 31). The remaining two categories can be characterized as “public” and “private” religious associations, respectively. And although they had some similar organizational characteristics, they were dissimilar enough to warrant separate investigation.

Public religious associations were most often found connected to a public sanctuary and fell under the administration of the city (*polis*). Within this realm lies the mystery cults, which themselves were often tied to the *polis*—as was the case of the mysteries of Demeter at Eleusis, near Athens. Other well-known and popular mysteries include those of Dionysus, Demeter, Isis, and Mithras. For the most part these mysteries began as local cult groups but, at least by the first or second century C.E., grew to have a broader appeal throughout the Greco-Roman world.

Initiation into one or another of the mysteries was usually a matter of choice. One participated in a ritual of status transformation that was usually a collective experience. For the most part the ceremonies were tied to the cycle of nature. Otherwise, very little is known about the actual rites themselves, since, as the name implies, their rituals were closely guarded secrets. Apuleius, the second-century C.E. Roman rhetorician and Platonic sophist, says concerning the mysteries of Isis: “If I were allowed to tell you, and you were allowed to be told, you would soon hear everything; but, as it is, my tongue would suffer for its indiscretion and your ears for their inquisitiveness” (*Metam.* 18). Once initiated, persons could return for special ceremonies or festivals. Noninitiates, however, were barred from participation.

The Mysteries at Eleusis

The Eleusinian mysteries provide an interesting, and somewhat representative, case study of the larger mystery cults, since, as Everett Ferguson points out, they “exercised a formative influence on the mysteries of the eastern cults” and, by at least the first century C.E., were open to anyone who wished to join (*Backgrounds*, 200). The association began as a domestic cult at Eleusis, although it soon broadened out to include not only citizens of Eleusis, but also of Athens and eventually all Attica. Following Alexander the Great’s conquest of Greece, the appeal of the Eleusinian mysteries was broadened still further. Despite the initial expense of initiation into the cult, its benefits—particularly its promise of a happy afterlife—were considered worthy of the cost and it became popular with many. Initiation into the Eleusinian mysteries was open to all men and women, and sometimes even to children.

Initiates underwent three stages. In or around February or March they were purified through the “lesser mysteries” by fasting, the sacrifice of a pig, a water ritual (either sprinkling or bathing), the singing of hymns, and the bearing of a sacred vessel of some sort—though much of this, admittedly, remains a “mystery” to us. The “greater mysteries” took place during a ten-day period in September and involved a great procession from Athens to Eleusis, along with various rituals involving purification, sacrifices, and rites for the dead. A third level of initiation, “overseer” (*epoptēs*), could be attained one year after initiation into the greater mysteries. At the conclusion of the nocturnal rites in a large hall on the eighth day of the festival, those who were so designated remained behind to be shown some sacred objects called *hiera*—the nature of which is unknown, but perhaps consisted of cut wheat, sacred chests or baskets, and poppy flowers. The central rites of initiation seem to have included “things enacted” (*drōmena*, perhaps a sacred pageant recounting the foundational myth), “things said” (*legomena*), and “things shown” (*deiknymena*). Those initiated then considered one another to be “brothers” (*adelphoi*).

Other mysteries, such as those of Dionysus, Isis, and Mithras, had initiation rituals and levels of adherence similar to that at Eleusis. The Isis mysteries had three classes of adherents: (1) those who attended the daily ceremonies and joined processions; (2) initiates who had the right to enter the temple and participate in the ceremonies; and (3) various levels of priests. The male-only mystery of Mithraism had seven grades of initiation, corresponding to the order of the seven planets in astrology.

There is most often found at the sanctuaries of these mysteries a group of priests or priestesses (or both) who oversaw the administration of the cult. Priesthood could be obtained through inheritance, through election, or through purchase. For the most part, such officials were paid professionals whose numbers would never increase beyond the ability to be funded by the revenues from the cult. Walter Burkert somewhat overstates the case when he says, in comparing public mysteries with private religious associations, that “a corporation of this kind cannot develop into a self-sufficient, alternative religious community in the full sense” (*Ancient Mystery Cults*, 44). Indeed, private religious associations comprised of officials from the public mysteries existed in antiquity (as we will discuss below). Nonetheless, Burkert is correct insofar as the public mysteries, like the civic cults, remained less intimately organized than the private religious associations.

The Mysteries of Andania

Before discussing private religious associations in detail, it is worthwhile first to look at a private religious association that gained enough civic importance to become, in effect, a public mystery cult in the city of Andania, which was located in the southwestern part of the Greek Peloponnesus. In fact, the Andanian mystery cult was regarded by Pausanias, a second-century C.E. geographer and traveler, as second in importance only to the cult of Eleusis (see his *Description of Greece* 4.33.3–6). The lengthy regulations of the Andanian cult are recorded in an inscription that dates from 92/91 B.C.E. (see *IG 5/1.1390*; trans. Meyer, *The Ancient*

Mysteries, 51–59). Little is revealed in the inscription concerning the initiation rituals and sacrifices. Rather, much of the inscription is taken up with regulations to be followed by those participating in the mysteries. In so doing, however, the inscription also reveals the organizational structure of this private religious association that became in southern Greece something of a public mystery cult.

The Andanian mysteries were laden with layers of officials. At the top stood Mnasistratos, with his wife and children, who was the founder (or refounder) of the cult as a result of his having donated a chest and books and who was duly honored with a crown, the lead position in sacred processions, and portions of the sacrifices. Under Mnasistratos was a supervisory council of ten male citizens, who were to be at least forty years old and appointed by general election. This group was to oversee the administration of the sacred officials. Under the supervisory council were the sacred officials, both male and female, who were appointed on the basis of their capabilities. From among the sacred officials were chosen mystagogues and twenty rod-bearers. The category of rod-bearers designates those who were to enforce the regulations of the association through physical punishment. The entire body of sacred officials was required to swear an oath of purity and of maintenance of the secrets of the mysteries. Once sworn, they received from the previous year's officials the cultic objects. The supervisor of the female sacred officials also was to appoint by lot one woman to oversee a group of sacred virgins to participate in the mysteries.

Other officials are mentioned in the regulations regarding the procession, including the priests and priestesses of the gods of the mysteries (particularly "the Great Mother" Demeter, the divine benefactress of humanity), the director of the games, the mistress of the banquet and her assistants, and various entertainers (i.e., "flute players"). There is a clear distinction between the initiated and the uninitiated, with the latter being banned from certain areas in the sacred grove. Some of the civic officials would continue in a related supervisory role during the time of the festival. Thus the supervisor of the market was in charge of the selling of goods in the area of the sacred grove, and the scribe of the magistrates administered the oath for the sacred officials appointed for the festival. The city treasurer was to oversee and audit five (wealthy) persons elected to manage the funds from the mysteries. These five were responsible for all the revenues and disbursements, and they were to provide a balanced financial account at the end of the festival, for the festival was to be financially self-sustaining, with any extra revenue reverting back to the city.

The sacrificial animals were to be chosen carefully according to specific criteria. Once sacrificed, portions were allotted to various officials and the remainder was consumed as part of a sacred meal. There is a clear concern in the Andanian cult inscription for orderly behavior during the festival—especially during the performance of the sacred rites. Disorderly behavior is regulated through the threat of fines, floggings, and expulsions, as designated by the officials and administered by the rod-bearers. In addition, the names of convicted offenders and their offenses were to be permanently inscribed on a building in the sacred area.

Little differentiation is made in the inscription between male and female or slave and free in terms of their participation in the sacred rituals. The sacred area itself is to be treated as a place of refuge for slaves. Differentiation, however, is made in terms of purity regulations (e.g., a female official is to take an additional oath of fidelity to her husband) and punishments (e.g., free persons are fined, whereas slaves are fined double and scourged). The Andanian cult inscription ends with the words: “The rule is to be authoritative for all time.”

3. “VOLUNTARY” ASSOCIATIONS

Whereas the philosophical associations (“philosophical schools”) and public religious associations (“mystery religions”) were legal within the Roman Empire, private religious associations and professional associations (usually referred to more generically as “voluntary” associations) were technically barred under various Roman laws enacted as early as 184 B.C.E. Exceptions were granted to associations considered to have been established for some time—as, for example, the Jewish synagogues, which used this exemption to claim protection from local civic authorities. Yet despite occasional suppression by the authorities, voluntary associations never completely disappeared, and they were always able to reassert themselves as a viable presence in Greco-Roman society.

Private Religious Associations

Private religious associations met for the primary purpose of religious worship, but did so outside of the larger, civically sanctioned mysteries and cults of the day. Their domain was generally domestic—although a number of associations met in public spaces, and some even met as private religious associations within a larger public cult. Membership in a private religious association was based primarily on the attraction of the particular deity or deities worshiped. As such, they tended to draw persons from all strata of Greco-Roman society—although the elites of society were probably not as numerous in such associations as were the urban poor, slaves, and freed persons. Religious associations were generally gender-inclusive, at least in admitting to membership both males and females. As one inscription puts it, they are open to “men and women, freeborn and slaves” (*SIG*, 3d ed., 985). One even finds instances of the membership of children in Dionysiac religious associations. Nevertheless, there were also religious associations that were gender-exclusive—either all male or all female. And in mixed gender associations positions of leadership tended to be predominantly male, although there were a number of exceptions.

Professional Associations

Professional voluntary associations, or guilds, were made up of artisans or manual laborers. Guilds from a wide range of professions existed throughout the Greco-Roman world. Among laborers there were guilds for almost every profes-

sion, including leather-workers, purple-dyers, carpenters, bakers, tanners, silversmiths, and the like. Domestic workers tended to stick together and so formed associations comprised exclusively of such. Entertainers had their own guilds; evidence exists for such associations as actors (“Dionysiac artists”), gladiators, and athletes. Professional musicians even formed themselves into professional associations, with their members being employed each year for the various cultic celebrations—such as those of the Andanian mysteries. There are, in fact, very few professions not represented in the extant records of the professional voluntary associations of antiquity.

Although the central commonality among members of professional associations was their occupation, the religious aspect of such associations should not be discounted. In every instance professional associations claimed the patronage of a deity or deities, and they took seriously their worship of such deities; whenever they met, the gods were invoked, and special festivals and rituals were central to their communal life. Often the deity or deities chosen had some connection to the particular profession. Thus we find such connections as a Delian association of shippers who worshipped Poseidon, the god of the sea, or an association of gardeners dedicated to the earth goddess Demeter. A number of different professions were associated with Dionysus, such as winegrowers, cowherds, actors, and pantomimes.

Professional associations, as well as private religious associations, were generally small in terms of membership, averaging perhaps fifteen to one hundred—although at times they could reach as high as four hundred or even twelve hundred members. The social status of the members was generally tied to the status of their particular profession within Greco-Roman society. As a highly structured culture, each profession would have had its place within the social stratification of the day. It is therefore safe to assume that, being laborers, the majority of the members of professional associations were of the artisan class, and so generally poor. Within this underclass, however, professional associations could include slaves, freed persons, and free persons. In a number of instances, in fact, recorded members of professional associations have three names, which indicates that they were Roman citizens. Likewise, the professional associations of antiquity had some wealthy members and drew on patrons to sponsor their activities.

Unlike many of the private religious associations, professional associations tended to be gender-exclusive. This was due in large part to gender separation in the work force. Thus professions dominated by males had professional associations comprised only of males and professions dominated by females tended to have all-female associations. What little crossover there was reflects elites of one gender patronizing an association of the opposite gender. For example, in one Roman association we have the case of a woman patron of an all-male association who is publicly thanked in an inscription for her patronage, but who does not herself participate in the banquet that her generosity has funded (cf. *CIL* 10243; dated 153 C.E.).

Organizational Structure

Professional associations often organized themselves by modeling the civic structures. This can be seen in the variety of civic titles used to designate associations, such as *phylē*, *hetairia*, *kollēgion*, *synedrion*, *synodos*, *ekklēsia*, and *politeuma*. The term for “citizenship” (*politeuma* and its cognates), for example, is found in use in two Egyptian associations, one religious and one professional (comprised of soldiers), in a Carian association dedicated to Zeus, and in a number of associations formed on the basis of a common homeland by those living outside their home city (e.g., the Tyrian Merchants at Ostia). There are also at least five instances of the use of *ekklēsia* as a community designator, from Samos, Asia Minor, and Delos, all from the second century B.C.E. to the second century C.E. In light of this evidence, it is especially interesting to note that Luke, who uses the designation *ekklēsia* for Christian groups, also calls the assembly of professional silversmiths at Ephesus an *ekklēsia* (Acts 19:32).

Community founders played a key role in the maintenance of the association, often presiding over the association or acting as its patron. We find instances of founders dedicating rooms or buildings for the use of the association. But founders could also maintain a high degree of control over the group. Such was the case with Xanthos, who would not allow the sacrifices to be undertaken if he were not present and reserved the right of succession for his designate (cf. *IG* 2, 2d ed., 1366).

Much has been made of the inclusive, egalitarian nature of voluntary associations, and, for the most part, this seems to have been the case at a very general level. Belonging to an association often brought about opportunities to participate in the organizational structure of the association. We also, however, find a degree of hierarchy in associations in so far as there are levels of leadership and honors to which members may aspire. Voluntary associations did not have a uniform organizational structure. This is not to say that they did not have any organizational structure. Indeed, they tend to reflect complex organizational behavior, albeit with local differences in structures and titles.

Voluntary associations were adaptive, well able to transform their structures in order to respond to new situations arising either internally or outside the group. Associations that shared a common designator and common leadership terminology did not always assign similar functions to those titles. This is well illustrated in the cases of eight associations of Sarapiastai found throughout the Greco-Roman world, which show no similarity of organization.

The range of titles found for functionaries within both religious and professional voluntary associations is vast. Some of the more common titles include “priest” and “priestess” (those who were responsible for the cult of the association), “treasurer” (*tamias*, who oversaw the collection and disbursement of funds), “secretary” (*grammateus*, who recorded the minutes of the meeting and insured that inscriptions were commissioned), “manager” (*epimeletēs*), and “examiner” (*exetastēs*). Many other titles are given on the basis of function, such as “water bearer” or “casket bearer” or “bouncer.” The leader of the association could go by a number of titles, including *patēr*, *matēr*, *archōn*, and *prostatēs*—the

latter found only occasionally in the sense of “patron.” It is interesting to note that in at least six non-Jewish associations, five of which are in Macedonia, the title *archisynagōgos* is used of a leader. Such leaders would convene and chair meetings, oversee the rites, arrange for banquets and funerals, and enforce the regulations and decrees of the associations. They often also served as patrons or benefactors and were so designated through honorific statements.

Among leadership titles in associations we even find the occasional use of *episkopos* and *diakonos*. Only in some cases can it be determined what such titles indicate. Furthermore, the titles seem to have connoted different job descriptions from association to association. *Episkopos* was used to indicate a financial officer, a cult functionary, and a person who oversaw the honorific matters of the association. *Diakonos* was used of sacral officials, including a priest, and of liturgical functionaries. It is clear that the latter title was not restricted to the role of a table functionary, as is so often assumed.

Positions of leadership could be gained through appointment (particularly by the founder of the association), election, or, in some cases, through purchase, with the position going to the highest bidder. Funds, of course, would go to the administration of the association. Serving as a leader in an association brought with it great status within the association and, if the association was large enough, brought status within the larger social context. At the same time, positions of leadership could be financially burdensome, for cash-flow problems and revenue shortfalls were expected to be alleviated by those in leadership. This is particularly true in the case of the treasurer. An inscription from Kallatis records the situation of a treasurer who had to repay, with interest, association money he had lost in a maritime investment gone sour (cf. *SIG*, 3d ed., 1108; dating from the third century B.C.E.).

Patronage was also an important feature of association life, as it was generally in the Greco-Roman world. Wealthy patrons would bestow on a particular association financial donations to be used for operating costs, religious festivals, commemorative events, or social occasions. Such benefaction was recognized through public proclamations and honorary inscriptions. In fact, such benefaction was often encouraged among the membership by setting up some sort of agonistic situation—as witness, for example, an inscription from the Piraeus which, in the midst of honoring one benefactor, states that the statute was set up “so that also the others shall be zealous for honor among the members, knowing that they will receive thanks from the members deserving of benefaction” (*IG* 2, 2d ed., 1263; from the third century B.C.E.).

Such benefaction could be costly, and those who fell on hard times would have to withdraw their patronage. Among the Egyptian papyri we find the following letter:

To Thrax, the president, and to the fellow members of the association, from Epiodoros. Since I am impoverished and unable to act as benefactor to the guild, I ask that you accept my resignation. Farewell. (*P. Kar.* 575; dated 184 C.E.)

One can certainly feel the pathos of the sender of this letter.

The other primary means for obtaining money for the association was through the collection of membership dues, either on entrance into the association or during attendance at each meeting. Membership into an association located in the Roman city of Lanuvium during the second century C.E., for example, was gained through the payment of an initiation fee of one hundred sesterces and an amphora of good wine (*CIL* 14.2112). Dues would go toward the association's expenses—although, in most cases, without patronage membership dues were not enough to cover all the group's expenses. Expenses would include the association's banquets, festivals, burial of members, and general expenses. In some cases money might be collected toward the upkeep of buildings or the erection of statues and inscriptions. Occasionally associations used their common funds to help out needy members.

Associations evidenced strong bonds among members. It is common to find kinship language used within the group, with members referred to as "brothers" and leaders and patrons designated as "fathers" or "mothers." These strong bonds were also expressed by the use of such a designation as "friends" for the associates of the group (cf. *IG* 2, 2d ed., 1369). The communal bond itself is often designated by the term *koinon* and its cognates.

It would be misleading, however, to suggest that internal community relations were completely amicable. We have, in fact, abundant evidence to the contrary. Inscriptions were often set up outlining the internal community regulations of associations. Members were warned against such abuses as "disorderliness" (*akosmeō*), taking another member's seat, insulting another member (or a member's mother), or physically abusing another. In general, failure to meet the moral or communal standards set by the association would result in one or more of any number of the following punishments: fines, flogging, restrictions from the association's rituals, temporary expulsion, or loss of membership. In some cases, a special group of "bouncers" was in place to remove violators of the association's regulations (see *IG* 2, 2d ed., 1368).

Although sometimes accused of all sorts of vices—not only in antiquity, but also today in scholarly literature—many religious associations included moral codes of conduct for both personal ethics and social morality. In a well-known inscription from Philadelphia in Lydia, for example, men and free women are prohibited from having sexual intercourse with anyone other than their spouse on pain of restricted access to the association's meeting place for the men and "evil curses" for the women (*SIG*, 3d ed., 985).

In addition to intragroup tensions, voluntary associations seem to have been also at times in conflict with one another. This is implied in the cry of the Athenian Iobacchoi: "Now we are the first of all the Iobacchoi!" (*IG* 2, 2d ed., 1368). It is also suggested in the stipulation of a priestess of Dionysus at Thessalonica that when she dies, if the designated association does not carry out her wishes, her bequest is to be transferred to a different association (*IG* 10/2.260). To be sure, the latter association will be watching the first group.

Membership in a number of voluntary associations included initiation rites. An Attic inscription dating from the second century C.E., for example, de-

scribes a process whereby a candidate must be examined by a number of officials to see whether he is “holy, pious, and good” before gaining entry into the association (*IG* II² 1369). Likewise, the fragmented ending of *IG* 10/2.255 from Thessalonica seems to indicate that one of the priestesses violated the association’s code by involving noninitiates in the sacred rites of the association, which suggests that an initiation was required for full participation.

One particularly illustrative text from Philadelphia, in Egypt, records on papyri the “authoritative” laws of the association (*synodos*) of Zeus Hypsistos (*P. Lond.* 7.2193; dated about 69–58 B.C.E.). The association met in a public temple and elected a president and his assistant for a one-year term. No other officers seem to exist. The association itself was formed not by a single individual but by the members themselves. A monthly banquet is stipulated at which there are to be libations, prayers, and “other customary rites on behalf of the god.” The text then goes on to set forth the association’s communal regulations:

All are to obey the president and his assistant in the matters pertaining to the association (*koinon*), and they shall be present at all command occasions to be prescribed for them and at meetings and assemblies (*synagōgai*) and outings. It shall not be permissible for any one of them to [.] or to make factions or to leave the brotherhood of the president to join another brotherhood or for men to enter into one another’s pedigrees at the banquet, or to abuse one another at the banquet, or to chatter or to indict or charge another or to resign for the course of the year or again to bring the drinking to nought. (For text, translation, and commentary, see Roberts, Skeat, and Nock, “The Guild of Zeus Hypsistos.”)

Unfortunately, the text becomes fragmented at this point. The exclusivity clause forbidding the joining of another association is particularly interesting since such a clause is not found in the extant regulations of other associations.

4. CONCLUSION

Further nuancing of the data regarding the various types of associations in Greco-Roman antiquity is certainly possible and necessary. For example, in addition to the two types of private associations described above—religious and professional—there are other types, some of which overlap with these two broad categories, such as associations based on common ethnic or geographic origin or residence in the same neighborhood.

Furthermore, it is difficult to demarcate the different types of associations as clearly as one might wish. The Pythagorean school, for example, was one of the earliest philosophical schools, yet its organization may have been influenced by Greek political associations (*hetaireiai*) or by Orphic associations (*thiasoi*). Indeed, the philosophical schools of the Pythagoreans and the Epicureans have often been understood as religious associations (cf. Strabo 17.1.8; Tertullian, *Apol.* 38.1.5; but see Culpepper, *Johannine School*, 248, 252). An example of a less well-known group comes from Egypt, where we have the following inscription:

“The philosophers [honored] Aelius Demetrius, rhetor, after Flavius Hierax their fellow diner dedicated [this statue of] . . . and father” (*I. Alex.* 98; dating from the second half of the second century C.E.). The public mysteries often contained within their structures smaller, private religious associations; these were sometimes composed entirely of members of the same occupation without formally being professional associations (see *SEG* 45 [1995], no. 2074).

One result of treating these usually separated associations together in this chapter is to underline the necessity of seeing all of them—and I would include here as well Jewish and Christian associations—as somewhat differing manifestations of the same phenomenon: as differing manifestations of voluntary associations. As further explorations of these varieties of voluntary associations are undertaken, we will undoubtedly begin to understand more fully the array of associative models that were operative in antiquity and under whose influence those who worshiped Jesus began to form themselves into associations. In doing so, we will see how much, as Ilias Arnaoutoglou has reminded us, “cultural context influences and shapes the forms of organisational structure” (“Between *koinon* and *idion*,” 75).

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